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**Understanding child perpetration of violence:
A case study**

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
award of the

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to understand the severe acts of violence committed by six boys from the Western Cape farming community. The six boys, aged between 8 and 13 years, were the primary participants. They were all children of farm workers. Individuals who were either connected to them as well as those who were informed about their community were also interviewed. Those connected to them included their mothers, teachers, a farm owner, a social worker, and a health worker. Those not directly related to the boys but informed about their community were: another farm owner, an educational psychologist, a school lifeskills programme manager, and researcher in the area of occupational health of farm workers. A case-study approach was used, with the event in question making up the case. Semi-structured interviews were used to interview all participants. All interviews were audiotaped, transcribed and then analysed. The basic process of content analysis of qualitative data was used, while Bronfenbrenner's theory of development guided the analysis. The findings of this study do not claim to explain the violent acts of this case. They do however highlight the significant role the boys' environments played. It was clear that their families, peers, and neighbourhoods had significant influence in the culmination of their acts. Acts that seemed from the outset to be a gruesome peculiarity, on closer inspection revealed themselves as not unusual in this exceptionally violent community. The social context in which violent children grow up therefore has to be examined as carefully and as critically as the boys themselves.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“Six farm children, aged between eight and 13, face charges of attempted murder for allegedly tying up an eight-year-old and assaulting him when he threatened to expose their killing spree that left 21 buck dead - most of them a rare breed. Two of the boys, who allegedly pushed a stick into their victim's anus, also face charges of indecent assault...The boys are alleged to have battered the animals to death with vine sticks and stones” (Kemp, 2004).

This extract from a newspaper article describes what seems like senseless violence committed by children. This case was intriguing in that the events were being portrayed as having very little motive and the children involved were described as nonchalant about the acts they had committed. These factors, coupled with the steady rise in children committing violence in South Africa in recent years made this event noteworthy for psychological study.

1.1 The Event

Although there were discrepancies between the boys' stories when they were interviewed for this study, the following is the most agreed upon sequence of events. Six boys, aged between eight and thirteen years and all from the Stellenbosch Winelands area, were involved in the incident. Over the course of two days, the boys bludgeoned to death a total of twenty one buck and brutally sexually and physically assaulted an eight-year old boy (who will be referred to as Boy X). On the first day (a Saturday) four of the boys as well as Boy X met up at the oldest boy's house. The oldest boy suggested that they go and hit the buck that were enclosed nearby. They then went to a dam near their homes to wait until dark. Once it was nearly dark, they made their way to where the buck were kept. By this time, Boy X had gone home. They found implements that could be used as weapons (sticks and iron poles) along the way. Once they reached the buck enclosure, they guided the animals into a smaller fenced-off area in which they could easily catch and bludgeon them. Once they were done, they headed for the oldest boy's house, taking three of the buck with them. The oldest boy's parents were drunk and asleep. In a shed outside the house they cut the

buck up and tried to cook pieces of it on an open fire. All four of the boys slept over at the oldest boy's house that night.

The next day, the Sunday, Boy X later met up with them and told them that he had told his grandmother that they had killed the buck. He also threatened to tell the farmer about this. The oldest boy told the rest of the boys that they should punish him for telling on them and to try to prevent him from informing the farmer. They led Boy X to a dam and started kicking him and beating him with branches, an iron pole, and their fists. They then sodomised him and inserted a stick into his anus watching as the victim's blood flowed. It is not clear from the boys' stories who sodomised Boy X, although the oldest boy admitted that he was one of them. The oldest boy also acknowledged that he thought Boy X would die. He said he was content with this, as it would mean that they would not have to be concerned about the farmer finding out about the buck.

They then led Boy X to a river, and tied him to a tree with some rope. They all went back to the oldest boy's house, leaving the victim tied up. The oldest boy then decided that they would all go back and kill more of the buck that night, which they did. The next day (Monday), a farm worker alerted Boy X's grandmother to the fact that he had been assaulted. She found him next to a tree nearby her home with his hands tied. He was taken to the farm owner and an ambulance was called. The buck were discovered by a security guard who alerted the farm manager. Trackers from the police stock theft unit were called in and they followed a bloody trail from the scene of the crime to some of the boys' homes on the neighbouring farm. That morning, police came to the boys' school and took them into custody regarding the buck and the boy.

1.2 Children and Violence in South Africa

An important part of the setting in which this event took place is the situation with regard to children and violence in South Africa. Statistics in recent years show that the amount of violence that children are witness to and/or victims of is considerable and on the increase (Barnard & Ngcobo, 2006; Gerardy, 2008; Kassiem, 2008; "One child

raped every 24 minutes”, 2007). It should be noted, however, that crimes against children reported to the police are often considerably less than the social services data, indicating a gross underestimation of actual occurrences of violence toward children, as Parker and Dawes note in their 2003 study of child sexual abuse. Recent studies show that more than half of their child participants have been witnesses to or victims of violence. Examples of this include that 50% were victims and 82% were witnesses of violence in a 2001 Cape Town study (Ward, Flisher, Zissis, Muller, & Lombard, 2001); 83% were either victims or witnesses of a trauma as defined by the DSM-IV in 2004 in Seedat, Nyamai, Njenga, Vythilingum, and Stein’s 2004 study, and 68.44% were both victims and witnesses in a 2006 study (Dawes, Long, Alexander, & Ward, 2006). This 2006 study also found that the children in their study had witnessed, on average, more than three types of violence and had been victims of more than one kind of violence. Also giving an indication of the prevalence of violence towards children are reported crimes against children, which, during the period 1996 to 2000 had increased from 67 000 to more than 72 000 (University of Cape Town [UCT], Children’s Institute, 2003). These crimes include murder, attempted murder, assault, rape, kidnapping, common assault, and assault with intention to do grievous bodily harm. In 2001 the most reported crime was physical assault (murder, common assault, assault with intention to do grievous bodily harm) at 37 669 and the second highest reports were of sexual assault cases (including rape, sodomy, indecent assault and other sexual offences) at 25 578 (UCT, Children’s Institute, 2003).

Next is a more detailed break-down of the kinds of violence children in South Africa fall victim to or are exposed to. Statistics are provided for specific kinds of violence and assault. Some demographics of the victims and the perpetrators are included, as well as common locations for violence.

The category of *physical assault* includes domestic violence, violence at school and community violence.

Statistics on physical assault include the findings that during the period January 1999 to June 1999, homicides accounted for a quarter of all non-natural deaths of under-18s (Peden, 1999, as cited in Children’s Institute, 2003). Some factors specific to South Africa which sheds light in these high rates of homicides is the fact that, as at 2001,

South Africa was reported as having the highest firearm homicides in the world (UCT, Children's Institute, 2003); gangsterism is rife; and violence in schools continues to be on the increase (Kassiem, 2008; "SA schools most dangerous in the world", 2008; "W Cape to tackle child gangsterism", 2007).

Dawes et al. (2006) used hospital records, as actual records of physical abuse were not available. Victims were most commonly boys under five years old and the perpetrators most often a male, known to the child, such as the father or mother's intimate partner. These instances of physical abuse occurred most often in the child's home.

Regarding *domestic violence*, a recent survey found that 49% of parents admitted to hitting or smacking their children (Dawes, de Sas Kroppiwinski, Kafaar, & Richter, 2006, as cited in Pillay, Roberts, & Rule, 1991). This figure is of concern, as attempts to discipline a child using corporal punishment can readily turn into physical abuse (Dawes et al., 2006). This survey also found that, in the Western Cape, 40% of women who use a strap, belt or stick did so to children under the age of three. Children of this age group are very much at risk of being severely hurt from beatings (Dawes et al., 2006).

In addition to being victims of violence in the home, South African children are also indirectly exposed to a great deal of violence. For example, 16% of parents admitted to being in violent relationships in the 2003 South African Social Attitude Survey (SASAS), which means that their children are exposed to a substantial amount of intimate partner violence (Pillay, et al., 1991). The 2005 National Youth Victimization Survey found that a fifth of children between the ages of twelve and seventeen had been exposed to violence of all kinds in the home, eight percent had experienced domestic violence in which a weapon was used, and eight percent of them reported that the perpetrator had been under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time (Leoschut & Burton, 2006). Through being exposed to violence in the home, these children are at serious risk for injury.

Studies investigating *violence in schools* have revealed that seven out of every 10 000 learners were exposed to physical, sexual, verbal or emotional abuse, or substance abuse (Western Cape Education Department's [WCED] Safe Schools Call Centre (SSCC) data, as cited in Dawes et al., 2006) and that two out of every 1 000 educators have had a complaint of abuse and violence against learners laid against them (Education Labour Relations Statistics, 2004 – 2005, as cited in Dawes et al., 2006). Twenty-three percent of 12- to 17-year olds have been hurt; or are threatened/are fearful of being hurt at school (Leoschut & Burton, 2006), while 24% were sexually assaulted at school and 56% of them had been hit by teachers or principals as punishment. While those most likely to be victims of violence in the school context are males, females have a much higher risk for sexual victimisation (Reddy et al., 2003).

For *community violence*, the 2005 National Youth Victimisation Survey has ascertained that 16% of the 12- to 17-year olds surveyed had been a victim of assault in the 12 months leading up to being surveyed, while 68% had seen someone intentionally being hurt outside of their home (mostly in their neighbourhood) (Leoschut & Burton, 2006). In the majority of these cases (75%), the attacker was known to them. Gangsterism, rife in South Africa, and particularly the Western Cape, also results in a high exposure to crime and violence in the child's community (Dawes et al., 2006; Ward, 2007; Ward, Martin, Theron, & Distiller, 2007).

On the topic of *sexual assault*, Dawes et al. (2006) used Red Cross Hospital admission records to determine that from the period 1991 to 1999, approximately 700 children under the age of 12 years were admitted for injuries related to sexual assault (an average of 78 cases per year) (van As, 2000). Parker and Dawes (2003) used data from the children's rights group RAPCAN (Resources Aimed at the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect) and the South African Police Services (SAPS) and found that reported sexual crimes against children were on the increase from 1996 to 2000 (23 430 in 1996 and 25 578 in 2000). KwaZulu-Natal was identified in 2000 as having the highest number of reports of sexual crimes against children at just under 5 500 reports (National Crime Prevention Strategy, 1996, as cited in UCT, Children's Institute, 2003), while nationally for the period January 2001 to March 2001, 5 400 cases of child rape were reported (UCT, Children's Institute, 2003). Data from

Childline (South Africa's call centre for reporting child abuse) recorded 1 734 calls reporting child sexual abuse in 2000 with most of these calls coming from the Western Cape at 27% (Dawes et al., 2006). Although not representative of South Africa as a whole (as only data from the Cape Metropole and Southern Cape/Karoo regions were available), data from sexual assault treatment facilities indicate that there is an increase in reports of sexual assault on children under 13 years old (Dawes et al. 2006). This data show sexual assault rates of 1.6 in every 1000 children in the Cape Metropole and 1.8 in every 1000 children in the Southern Cape/Karoo region.

The Western Cape is notorious as the province in South Africa with the highest levels of child sexual assault statistics. Statistics on child sexual abuse and rape will therefore focus on the Western Cape. The vast majority of admissions to Red Cross Hospital for sexual assault-related injuries were female (87%) and had an average age of 6.3 years (van As, 2000). Interestingly the victims were mainly found to be male (52%) in a 2003 study of the sexual abuse problem in Atlantis (in the Western Cape) (Parker & Dawes, 2003), although the reason for this discrepancy is not clear. In addition, the majority (three-quarter) of victims were teenagers (although they point out that this could be because most violence towards children is reported to social services) (Parker & Dawes, 2003). The perpetrators were mainly adults (69%) and were almost always known to the victim (nearly 94%), with 20% being friends to the victim, a father (9%), mother (9%) or neighbour (10%) (Parker & Dawes, 2003). Van As also reports that since the completion of this study there has been an increase in these admissions for sexual assault-related injuries in children. Worryingly, the average age of perpetrators of sexual assault has been on the decline with 43% of all cases reported to Childline as children under the age of 18 years (van Niekerk, 2003; Wood, Welman, & Netto, 2000). Many of these children were survivors of abuse themselves.

As these statistics on violence against children reflect, levels of violence against children in South Africa are extremely high. Child on child violence is also on the increase, including sexual violence (as noted earlier), and has reached its highest levels in recent years, although they are probably underestimations of the actual situation (Gerretsen, 2007; Hosken, 2003; Molosankwe, 2007; Naidu, 2004; Nicholson, 2007; Powell, 2007).

1.3 Violence on Farms in South Africa

Another important contextual feature to this study is the phenomenon of violence in the rural context in South Africa, particularly the Western Cape. Violence has been a long-standing problem on South African farms, although the issue of farmer brutality towards farm workers has largely been the focus. Violence of all kinds and between all parties is, however as big a problem. This includes domestic violence, sexual assault, violence against women, and community violence. Being a vulnerable group (due to low wages, job insecurity, cramped and poor housing conditions, isolation, illiteracy, and limited access to police, health and legal services), farm dwellers are particularly at risk for domestic violence and sexual assault.

South Africa has one of the highest rates of violence against women in the world. This is particularly true of isolated, vulnerable groups, such as women working and living on farms (Fredericks & Lopes, 2006; Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2001). Domestic violence is reported to be very high on farms, including those in the Western Cape, although it is difficult to gain accurate estimates as many cases are unreported. A 1999 study found that most of the Western Cape farmers interviewed (67%) felt that domestic violence was widespread on their farms (Sunde & Kleinbooi, 1999). Farm dwellers themselves also report domestic violence as being widespread. This was indicated in a study by Artz (1998), where 14 out of the 15 communities interviewed in the Southern Cape believed that an average of 80% of women were domestic violence victims.

Waldman (1995) found that violence towards women tends to have a sexual undercurrent and so it is not surprising that sexual assault is a common experience for female farm workers (Kritzinger, 2002; Shabodien, 2006; Waldman, 1995). Male farm workers in Waldman's (1995) study stated that they have a right to claim a woman's body by force if she did not comply with his wishes. Many women are forced to stay in coercive sexual relationships due to their poor socio-economic conditions (South African Human Rights Commission [SAHRC], 2003).

Women are not only sexually assaulted by their intimate partners, father, husbands and other farm workers, but also by farm owners and managers (HRW, 2001). As with domestic violence, it is difficult to ascertain the extent of sexual assault on female farm workers as these instances often go unreported (HRW, 2001). They have found to be more likely to report such assault if the perpetrator is another farm worker than assaults by farm owners and managers (HRW, 2001). In many of these cases (where other farm workers have been accused of rape), known perpetrators are left unpunished, victims are met with unsympathetic police officers (SAHRC, 2003), and farm owners prefer to distance themselves from the situation. This would help to explain the low numbers of reported cases.

Drugs, and especially alcohol abuse, is acknowledged as an epidemic on South African farms, particularly on Western Cape farms (e.g. Du Toit, 2004; Gibson, 2004; London, 1999; London, 2000). Alcohol abuse and violence are inextricably linked, and most violence is found to involve perpetrators who were under the influence of alcohol (Fredericks & Lopes, 2006; London, 2000, 2003; SAHRC, 2003; Waldman, 1995).

Violence from farm owners towards farm workers is the best-documented kind of violence on farms (London, 1999, 2003; HRW, 2001; SAHRC, 2003). These cases are also periodically highlighted in the news (*Farmers are abusing workers*, 1999; *Bakkie killing*, 2004; *Farmers blamed*, 2006) and in reports by human rights organisations (e.g. HRW, 2001; SAHRC, 2003). In the Western Cape, assault on farm workers in the form of dog attacks have been reported (SAHRC, 2003). Some state that this sort of violence is an attempt at controlling farm workers by farm owners (London, 1999, 2003; Waldman, 1993).

These socio-economic factors do not rule out the possibility that an event like this is also of interest to psychologists. Besides the very gruesome nature of the boys' acts, what was most striking about this case was the nonchalant way in which these children retold their story. They appeared to have no remorse for their actions, nor any empathy for their victim. This case therefore was amenable to psychological analysis.

Much research has been conducted on farm workers in South Africa, and particularly the Western Cape, in the last 15 years. None comes from the perspective, however, of one of the most vulnerable groups on farms, namely the children of farm workers. This lack of information on violence towards children living on farms, along with the paucity of research in the area of child perpetrators of violence also signalled the need for this study.

1.4 Psychological Theories Explaining Violence in Children

Psychology provides us with more than one way to analyse the behaviour of these children. Two such examples are *social learning theory* and *social cognitive theory*.

1.4.1 Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory argues that observation, modelling and reinforcement contingencies shape violent behaviour (Bandura, 1965, 1973, 1986). The attitudes and behaviours held by individuals in children's social environment regarding aggression and violence are seen as very influential, especially that of their parents and peers (Fields & McNamara, 2003). Media images also are thought to have influence in this regard (Huesmann et al., 1996).

Using social learning theory, Baldry's (2003) study attempted to look at the link between exposure to interparental violence, and bullying and being victimised at school in a sample of Italian children. Basing the hypotheses on social learning theory, it was anticipated that children who were exposed to direct forms of violence (for example hitting) would be more likely to engage in direct forms of physical bullying. Conversely, those children who lived in homes with indirect violence between parents (for example verbal abuse) would be more likely to be involved in indirect bullying against peers. The second hypothesis was that girls who experienced their father being violent towards their mother would be more likely to be victimised at school, while boys would be more likely to bully others. Similarly, girls whose mothers were violent towards their fathers would be likely to bully others. The study revealed that there was a significant association between interparental violence and

bullying and confirmed the abovementioned hypotheses. This was true even when factors like age, gender and child abuse were considered. In addition, this association was most true for girls.

1.4.2 Social Cognitive Theory

An adaptation of social learning theory, *social cognitive theory (SCT)*, incorporates some elements from cognitive-behavioural theory. Social cognitive theory conceives of aggression as being based on a variety of factors. These are:

- 1) the *learning* of aggressive behaviour from people around you, through both direct and vicarious experience, particularly from those in the home and from one's peers (DiLalla, Mitchell, Arthur, & Pagliocca, 1988);
- 2) the way in which aggression often becomes an automatic reaction for individuals when more appropriate skills for dealing with difficult social situations are not salient; and
- 3) the fact that aggressive behaviour often appeals to those who give in to immediate gratification over long-term gain (as the behaviour offers an immediate reward), as it does to those who receive ineffectual punishment for the aggressive behaviour (Bandura, 1996).

An example of a study that has used cognitive behavioural therapy to help understand aggression was Lochman and Dodge's (1994) study of the social-cognitive processes of severely violent, moderately aggressive, and nonaggressive boys. They looked at both preadolescent and early adolescent age levels and examined such processes as "cues, attributions, social problem solving, affect labelling, outcome expectations, and perceived competence and self-worth" (Lochman & Dodge, 1994, p. 366). They found that, in violent and moderately aggressive boys, many of these processes were distorted and lacking. Specifically, violent boys (of both age levels) had difficulties with "cue recall, attributions, social problem solving, general self-worth" (Lochman & Dodge, 1994, p. 366). The moderately aggressive boys displayed similar social cognitive difficulties as those of the severely violent boys, but also their aggressive behaviour appeared to be more thoughtful and with a goal in mind. Regarding the nonaggressive boys, they differed from the violent boys in terms of attributional

biases and low perceived self-worth, with the violent boys displaying more extreme social-cognitive dysfunctions.

1.4.3 Ecological Theory

The description given above of the general context of the boys' violent behaviour, suggests that one needs a psychological model that would recognise the importance of context. Of all developmental theories, the ecological theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner probably comes closest to such a model.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model allows one to view children in their developmental context. The model posits that a child is intricately intertwined with the environments in which he/she finds him-/herself (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). He/she has a dynamic relationship with these environments and exerts an influence on them, just as they influence the child, whether directly or indirectly. Similarly, the various environments in which the child is embedded (both proximal and distal) have an impact on one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

There are four main components to the ecological model, which is why Bronfenbrenner also refers to his model as a *Process-Person-Context-Time Model* (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). *Process* refers to the developmental process in which the dynamic relations of the individual and context take place. *Person* refers to the individual and his or her specific biological, cognitive, emotional and behavioural features. The *Context* within which human development takes place are the systems that Bronfenbrenner conceptualises as nested structures that fit inside one another, much like a set of Russian dolls. Lastly, *Time* is the "multiple dimensions of temporality – for example, ontogenetic time, family time, and historical time – constituting the chronosystem that moderates change across the life course (Lerner, 2005, p. xv).

The ecological model has evolved over the decades and has now come to be known as the *bioecological* theory to highlight the change in the model, namely the recognition that the child's own biology is instrumental in determining his or her development

through his/her interaction with the environment. With this greater emphasis on the child and the individual characteristics that he/she brings to his/her development comes two main propositions that highlight the bioecological model's defining characteristics.

The first proposition is the concept of *proximal processes*. These are enduring interactions that become more complex "between an active, evolving biopsychosocial human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 996). Examples of such processes would be any parent and child interaction or child and child interaction that take place on a fairly regular basis.

The second proposition highlights the dynamic nature of the proximal processes and that these processes are determined by the individual in question, their environment, as well as the aspect of the child that is being studied, for example academic achievement. In Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (1998) words:

"the form, power, content and direction of the proximal processes effecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person; the environment – both immediate and more remote – in which the processes are taking place; the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration; and the social continuities and changes occurring over time through the life course and the historical period during which the person has lived" (p. 996).

Next is a more detailed outline of the nested levels that make up the child's environments. The *Microsystem* comprises the environments in which the child has continuous, face-to-face interactions. Bronfenbrenner (1994) describes this system as "a pattern of activities, social roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment" (p. 5). Defining characteristics of the microsystem therefore are that it constitutes the child's immediate environment with which he/she has direct contact on a continuous basis. Examples of these settings would include their home, school, and peer group.

The next level is the *Mesosystem*, which is the interaction between the Microsystems, that is, the linkages and processes between the child's school and home, home and peers, etc. The mesosystem can be viewed as a system of microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

The *Exosystem* is the settings in which the child has no direct access, but that has an influence on individuals close to the child, thus influencing the child's immediate environment. Bronfenbrenner (1994) describes the exosystem as "linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the developing person, but in which events occur that indirectly influence processes within the immediate setting in which the developing person lives..." (p. 6). Examples of exosystems would be the effect of the parent's workplace or the neighbourhood-community context on the child's home environment.

Next is the *Macrosystem*, which includes the characteristics of a particular culture or subculture. The particular characteristics that the macrosystem refers to are aspects of the micro-, meso-, and exosystems that include the "belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, life-styles, opportunity structures, hazards, and life course options" of a culture or subculture (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 6). The macrosystem can therefore be thought of as the "blueprint" of a particular culture. The ecological model highlights the importance of ascertaining the social and psychological features of the culture that a child comes from in order to understand how his/her everyday, or microsystemic, environment is affected (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

The last level, the *Chronosystem*, represents another unique feature of the ecological model. Whilst most developmental theories view time merely as chronological age, the chronosystem is the history not only of the child in question, but also of his/her environments over time. This history would note both change and consistency in the child, the "family structure, socioeconomic status, employment, place of residence", etc. (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 6).

The ecological model is commonly used when studying children and violence, whether they were victims or perpetrators of violence. One such example is Eamon

and Mulder's (2005) study in which they attempted to establish predictors of antisocial behaviour in Latino American adolescents. They used the ecological model to determine predictors in the different settings in which these youth found themselves. At an individual, being of the male gender represented a risk factor, while a family characteristic identified as influencing this risk was mothers' acculturation (i.e. how well mothers had adapted to American culture). The higher the levels of mothers' acculturation, the lower the odds were of their children exhibiting antisocial behaviour.

Poverty was identified as a sociodemographic influence, as the longer an adolescent had been living in poverty, the higher the levels of antisocial behaviour that they exhibited (Eamon & Mulder, 2005). They also found that a "poor" neighbourhood (identified by the adolescents' mothers as a place not suitable for raising children) increased the risk for antisocial behaviour, while a better quality school lowered this risk. In the area of peers, poverty meant both that they would live in "poor quality" neighbourhoods and be exposed to deviant peer influences. These negative peer influences increased their vulnerability for antisocial behaviour.

When parenting practices were studied, it was found that adolescents with a parent-youth attachment demonstrated lower levels of risk for antisocial behaviour, while those who were spanked had a significantly higher risk than those who were not (although only small percentage of these youth were spanked considering their age).

A second example of a study that used the ecological model as theoretical underpinning is the 2003 study by Tolan, Gorman-Smith, and Henry. They investigated the development of violent behaviour in adolescent males in one of the United States' inner-city neighbourhoods. They aimed to test the developmental-ecology model of violence, which states that social community characteristics determine to some degree the impact that microsystems, such as parenting and deviant peers have on youth (Gorman-Smith, Tolan, & Henry, 2000; Pantin, Schwartz, Sullivan, Coatsworth, & Szapocznik, 2003). The effect of social ecology is therefore felt through the impact it has on family and friends.

In this study, social ecology was conceived of as comprising neighbourhood social processes and community structural characteristics. Neighbourhood social processes entailed neighbourliness and the extent of problems, such as drugs, vandalism, burglary, gangs, etc.; while community structural characteristics was a composite of the concentrated poverty, ethnic heterogeneity and economic investment (Tolan et al., 2003). They hypothesised that youth living in communities with certain structural characteristics (such as crime) would have an increased likelihood of engaging in violence themselves and that neighbourhood social processes would mediate this relation. Specifically, they stated that:

- 1) community structural characteristics would determine the neighbourhood social processes, parenting practices, peer violence and individual involvement in violence;
- 2) neighbourhood social processes would partly mediate the impact that community structural characteristics would have on microsystem processes;
- 3) microsystem influences would mediate the relation between Neighbourhood Social Processes and individual violence; and
- 4) parenting practices would be partially mediated by peer violence.

Their findings were largely in keeping with developmental-ecology theory, but there were a few unexpected results. Their general findings were that:

- 1) adolescents and their caretakers, residing in inner-city communities, were more likely than those in other urban poor communities to perceive higher levels of problems and lower levels of neighbourliness (social processes thought to buffer against risk) (Sampson, 1997); and
- 2) the extent to which communities have problematic structural characteristics affects the levels of perceived problems and the neighbourliness.

More specifically, they found that the level of perceived problems played a mediating role in the influence that community structural characteristics had on violence through parenting. This suggests that individual level of risk is more dependent on the severity of social problems in the community, rather than community structural characteristics. In addition, they found that parenting practices were related to the perceived extent of problems in that they were more vigilant the more impoverished the area was in which they lived. Neighbourhood problems and harmful community structural characteristics therefore served not to harm, but in fact to result in stronger parenting

practices. A finding that was not consistent with the model was that parenting influence on individual violence was fully mediated by peer violence. The model states that parenting has a direct impact on individual risk for violence (Dishion, Spracklen, Andrews, & Patterson, 1996). Tolan et al. (2003) do state, however that there are features of the analysis that bring into question the certainty of this finding. They state that this, amongst other limitations, suggests that their model was not complete and that there is a need for considering multiple models.

The present study sets out to shed light on the severe acts of violence committed by the six boys in this case. The studies that have been detailed above illustrate the promise that the ecological model holds when trying to understand violent situations involving children. Bronfenbrenner's theory of development is therefore the theoretical framework that will be the basis for the present study. The results and conclusions are framed within this theoretical context.

CHAPTER TWO: METHOD

2.1 Research Design

The issue under investigation in this study is the severe acts of violence carried out by a group of six boys. This subject matter posed particular challenges and it was therefore necessary to come up with a research design that could meet these challenges.

The case study method of research seemed most suited to understanding this matter. An in-depth, detailed understanding of the incident in question was sought and the case study methodology enabled this (Kazdin, 2003). The context in which these children find themselves, namely the Western Cape farming community, seems inextricably linked to what they have done. So much so, in fact, that the boundaries between what constituted the investigated phenomenon and the context of that phenomenon was not clearly defined. Employing the case study method allowed the study of these boys and their actions within their environment. This enabled a holistic, coherent picture to be painted without having to separate their actions from the environment of the said phenomenon (Yin, 1984, 1998).

As is often the case with case studies, there was some difficulty determining what exactly constituted the “case” at the outset of this investigation. Cases are often complex composites of all the contextual conditions surrounding it, making the exact dimensions and boundaries of the case seem rather unclear and fluid (Yin, 1998). In keeping with Punch’s (1998, p. 152) definition of a “case” as a “phenomenon...occurring in a bounded context”, it was decided that the case in this study would be defined as the incident of violence that the six children were involved in. As mentioned above, the six children would each constitute a unit of analysis.

Another decision when designing this study was whether the study should be a single-case or a multiple-case design. A single-case design was decided upon as the singular incident of violence was being looked at. In addition, this case concurs with one of the characteristics that Yin (1984) provides as a rationale for choosing a single case

design, namely that the instance of the phenomenon in question be extreme or unique in some way.

Next, the choice between holistic and embedded case study design had to be made. An embedded case study design involves a study where there is a main and overall unit of analysis, but within this unit there are also embedded units that are studied (Yin, 1984). For example, the current study might have been classified as an embedded case study design had the boys involved in the case been studied as embedded units within the violent acts, which form the main unit of analysis. The holistic case study design, on the other hand looks at the global nature of the unit of analysis.

The case of the violent acts committed by these boys alone will be studied and the boys as individuals will not be the focus. Where individual information about the boys is given or studied, it will be only to serve to understand their acts as a group. Consequently, a holistic case study design was chosen for this study.

The case study method of investigation is versatile enough to use either the quantitative or qualitative paradigm. This case study in particular was conducted in a qualitative manner, as an in-depth, detailed examination of the acts of violence was needed. By undertaking this study qualitatively, the researcher felt that an insider perspective could be obtained (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), as well as being able to derive the participants' own interpretation of their world and behaviour.

A brief note on the criticisms of the case study method is necessary. Case studies are commonly criticised for their lack of rigor, as a result of being biased and providing vague evidence (Yin, 1984). Kazdin (2003) has argued that if a case study is conducted under certain methodologically-sound conditions, it is possible to infer much about the case.

This connects with the other commonly cited criticism of the method, namely that the results gleaned are not generalisable (Yin, 1984). Exacerbating the issue is the fact that cases are very often atypical instances of events or phenomena to begin with,

making it even more difficult to generalise to more typical cases, individuals, instances or communities (Sommer & Sommer, 1986).

According to Yin (1998), however, the concept of generalisability has to be redefined when dealing with cases. He disagrees with critics, stating that it is possible to generalise from single case designs to other cases, but that this generalisation is *analytical* in nature rather than conventional statistical generalisation. So, instead of applying information from a sample to a population, one is doing so from one case to another theoretically-similar case. The case's findings can therefore be used to "illustrate, represent or generalize to a theory" (Yin, 1998, p. 239), what Yin refers to as a "level 2 inference" (as opposed to level one inference from a sample to a population).

Others have also put forward the idea that the depth to which one can study a case makes up for the few subjects studied and the lack of statistical generalisability (Sommer & Sommer, 1986).

2.2 The Sample and their Environmental Context

As is the case in many case studies, the incident being looked at in this study and the context surrounding it are inextricably bound (Yin, 1998). Given this, as well as Bronfenbrenner's belief of looking closely at all aspects of a child's context, the reader will find that more detail than usual will be provided about the case in this section.

The case study includes six boys who, at the time of the incident in question consisted of three eight-year-olds, two 11-year-olds, and a 13-year-old. All of the boys live with their biological mothers except one of the boys who lives with an unofficial foster mother. Four of the children live with their biological fathers, one with his mother's common-law husband and the "foster" child, with the partner of the "foster mother". Although the farms on which the boys live are in the same general area, only two of the children live on the same farm.

All of the six boys were still attending primary school at the time they committed the acts in question, with five attending the same primary school. This school is situated relatively nearby the farms on which these five boys live. Visits to both of the schools revealed neat, well-equipped schools. Children from both the farm as well as the surrounding previously-coloured suburbs attend these schools. No black or white learners were seen to be attending these schools.

Despite many improvements in legislation protecting farm workers post-1994, the reality is that not much has changed for farm workers throughout South Africa (Fast, 1997). They are still amongst the worst off - socio-economically - of South Africa's citizens and many are still largely isolated and oppressed. Working conditions are by and large, still notoriously poor (Du Toit, 2004; Levine, 2002; London, 1999, 2003; Shabodien, 2006).

Housing is provided to all farm workers who live on the farms. A recent survey (a joint undertaking by the Labour Research Service, Women on Farms Project and the Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies) was conducted of 17 Western Cape farms (Labour Research Service [LRS], Women on Farms Project [WFP], & Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies [PLAAS], 2004). They found that, on most farms, the state of the housing was generally quite good, with the structure being in a decent condition and most equipped with the basic amenities of running water, electricity and flushing toilets. The authors of the study do point out, however, that most of the farms participating in the survey were considered progressive farms. Their findings might not therefore be an accurate reflection of the state of farms in the Western Cape. After an interview with one of the boys, the researcher visited his home. The dwelling took the form of an open-plan room divided by make-shift partitions into the kitchen and two bedrooms. That particular house did not have electricity and the boy and his "foster" family made use of wood-burning fires to cook food and boil water for washing. The rest of the families indicated that they did have electricity in their homes.

Working conditions of farm workers have been reported as being largely characterised by job insecurity and ignorance and/or fear of asserting their rights as workers (Fast, 1997). Many workers do not have a formal work contract with their employers

making them vulnerable to abuses and exploitation by employers (Fast, 1997). The threat of *huisleegmaak* (the order to vacate their homes) is constantly present and is the biggest fear amongst many of the workers (van Rhyneveld, 1986). This fear was stated in more than one of the formal and informal conversations with the parents of the boys in this study. Farmers have been known to use violence in addition to these coercive work practices as a means of controlling their workers (London, 1999). According to Waldman (1993), racism by farmers is at the heart of much of the violence toward their workers. The boys' mothers mentioned one of the farm owners as being particularly brutal. After this farmer came to learn about the violence committed by the boys and resultant court case against the oldest boy (Boy 1), Boy 1's parents were reportedly regularly at the receiving end of this farm owner's violence. Boy 1's mother reported that this farmer would regularly come into their home and physically assault her, her husband and Boy 1 for no apparent reason.

Wages of farm workers have always been notoriously low (Wijeratna, 2005; Du Toit, 2004), with data from the Rural Foundation in 1996 indicating that the wages were so low that even the state pension at the time (R470 per month) exceeded these rates. Although there is now a minimum wage¹ for farm workers as set out by South Africa's Basic Conditions of Employment Act (75 of 1997), farm workers are often still paid less than this legal requirement. The LRS/WFP/PLAAS survey previously mentioned found that most farms audited adhered to leave and overtime benefits as specified in the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. Once again, this data may be skewed by the fact that they were collected from more progressive farms. The workers interviewed for the purposes of this study indicated that they obtained between R800 and R1000 per month.

The abuse of alcohol is well-documented as being a key underpinning of almost all domestic and interpersonal violence in farm settings (Gibson, 2004; London, 1999, 2000; Waldman, 1993, 1995). An indicator of this connection between alcohol abuse and violence on farms is the statistic from the National Trauma Research Programme

¹ Farm workers are required by law to be paid a minimum of R 1041.00 per month in urban areas and R989.00 per month in rural areas.

that around 50% of rural traumatic injuries are alcohol-related (as cited in London, 1999).

Alcohol abuse is hugely prevalent on most, if not all of Western Cape farms. So much so, in fact, that the alcoholism per capita found in a small town north of the Huguenot tunnel, Rawsonville, has landed it in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the highest such rates in the world (Levine, 2002). Statistics have shown that around 60% of farm workers suffer from alcoholism (London, 1999). Alcohol abuse is therefore an element of daily life on farms (London, 1999) and has been said to be part and parcel of farm culture. Not surprisingly so if one considers that binge alcohol consumption has been institutionalised on farms for over 300 years (Du Toit, 2004; London, 1999, 2003).

The farm workers interviewed would only admit to moderate drinking on the behalf of themselves and their spouses but all confirmed that there were generally high levels of alcohol consumption amongst farm workers. One of the boys' mothers interviewed also admitted to drinking heavily during her pregnancy with him. As can be imagined, foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) is prevalent amongst children on farms. Peripheral genetics clinics in the Western Province report FAS as the most regular condition seen (London, 2000). Although not officially diagnosed, the child of the mother who admitted to prenatal drinking does in fact seem to display some of the physical and cognitive features of FAS, as he seems to have a smaller than average-sized head and is quite small generally for his age. In addition his teachers have reported that he performs particularly poorly academically and has a very low concentration span. This seems to be in keeping with Steinhausen, Willms, Winkler Metzke, and Spohr's (2003, p. 179) description of the symptoms of FAS, namely "physical malformations, especially in the face, stunted growth, delayed psychomotor maturation, and impaired intellectual development".

As can be gathered from what has been said so far about farm life, violence has a pervasive and extensive influence (HRW, 2001). Violence seems to occur between and within all parties and groupings on these farms, including between farm workers and farm owner, male farm workers, spouses/common-law partners, parents and children, and children between themselves.

With regard to education, research indicates that the education farm children have access to is not of a very high quality (Fast, 1997; Nasson, 1984). Nasson (1984) has even gone so far as likening the education that farm children receive to a grooming process serving to ensure that the poverty they were born into gets maintained and reproduced. In Waldman's study (1993), she found that the farm children in her study generally decided themselves when they would leave school, most dropping out even before reaching high school. The extra financial burden that keeping their children in school places on farm workers often results in parents either encouraging or enforcing this decision to leave school (Levine, 2002).

An institution worthy of mention in this description of the main elements of farm life is the church and the role it plays in the lives of farm workers and their children. Although viewed as having a positive influence by some, such as in Ehlert's (1996) view that the religious faith of church-going farm workers bolsters their coping ability of the trying working and living conditions on farms, there are those who see the church's influence and role in a negative light. Segal (1990) and Waldman (1993), for example, both argue that the church is an indirect promoter of violence, as it knows about much of the violence that occurs on farms and yet remains silent about it. Waldman does acknowledge amongst her findings in her 1995 study, however, that belonging to and abiding by the rules of the church often resulted in less moneys spent on alcohol and drugs and, in turn, a reduction in the physical abuse of women.

On being asked about the church and its role in farm life, the manager of a social programme run at the school that four of the boys attend referred to the church as being more moralistic than moral. He said that members of the congregation could be rather judgemental and unthinking in their application of the "the word of God" in their lives. He also described the sense of religion that many of the farm workers have attained as a result of belonging to the church as an almost superstitious form of spirituality.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were obtained from semi-structured interviews. This form of interviewing was chosen as they allowed for a degree of consistency across interviews while at the same time affording the interviewer the flexibility to investigate areas that emerged during the course of the interview (Patton, 1980). It was difficult to anticipate the reaction that the boys would have to questions surrounding their crime. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, however, the flexibility that semi-structured interviews provided allowed the interviewer to incorporate appropriate changes as the dialogue progressed.

2.3.1 Data Collection Process

Interviews were conducted with a variety of people located within the different spheres of the boys' ecosystems (as listed in Table 2.1). This assisted in drawing on a range of perspectives in building up a picture. Interviews were held with five of the boys and three of the boys' mothers. Unfortunately, an interview with Boy 5 was not possible. Although an interview time was scheduled with him, other tasks set aside for that day took longer than predicted. The interview therefore did not take place as planned due to a lack of time. There were many difficulties with rescheduling an appointment with Boy 5 because of the fact that this population is generally difficult to contact and communicate with. A second attempt at interviewing Boy 5 was therefore unsuccessful and never materialised.

Three out of six of the boys' mothers were interviewed. The other three did not turn up for the scheduled interviews even when the researcher tried to reschedule a time with them. Although this was not confirmed with these individuals themselves, the other mothers interviewed stated that the other mothers did not turn up for the interviews because they could not get time off from work and/or did not have the bus fare necessary to get to the interview venue.

None of the boys' fathers were interviewed, as none of them agreed to meeting with the researcher. Boy 4 had no contact with his biological father and lived with his mother's partner, while Boy 6's father had abandoned him and Boy 6 lived with a foster mother and her partner. This would explain why Boy 4 and Boy 6's 'father-figures' declining being interviewed. While the rest of the boys lived with their biological fathers, the fathers' refusal to be interviewed could be viewed as part of the larger problem of the absence of fathers in this community. Research has found that children and adolescents who grow up in homes in which the father is absent have a higher risk for aggressive and violent behaviour (Bell & Jenkins, 1993) and personal victimisation (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1991; Malik, Sorenson, & Aneshensel, 1997) than those who live in homes in which the father is present.

Each child's "class" teacher was interviewed, that is the teacher who taught them all or most of their school subjects and therefore spent the most time with them. Two of the boys were in the same class and had the same class teacher, so five teachers in total were interviewed. The farm owner of the farm that is home to one of the boys was also interviewed. It was not possible to get any of the other farm owners to agree to being interviewed. A variety of professionals who work in the area of farm life were also consulted and interviewed, including a wine farm owner with some psychological training, an educational psychologist who works in schools in the area, and the manager of a programme being run at the school that most of the boys attend. In addition, a medical doctor and well-established researcher in the area of farm workers was consulted. Both the social worker and the health worker who worked at one of the boys' farm were interviewed. The health worker also lived on this farm.

It should be noted here that much of what was said by secondary interviewees (such as the social worker and teachers) was not specifically in relation to the six children. Rather, these individuals would often speak of farm children, farm workers and farm life in general. The information that these individuals provided, although often directly applying to the boys in this study, was useful in sketching a picture of the community in which these boys and their families lived. Most of the data that were used for the results and discussion of the findings of this study, however, came from interviews with the boys and their mothers.

All of the interviews with the boys were conducted by two interviewers: one a senior psychologist and the other the current researcher. Although a somewhat unconventional arrangement, circumstances necessitated it. The senior psychologist was involved in the court case which had resulted from the boys' acts, and was mandated as such by the attorneys. The current researcher was there in both her capacity as a researcher for this study and as research assistant to the senior psychologist. Thus only the senior psychologist was required to testify in court, as the researcher had no more information from the boys than he had. For this project the advantage was that the researcher was involved directly in the primary data collection, and did not have to rely on notes or secondary data sources. The boys' attorneys approved this arrangement. The situation was explained to the boys and their mothers prior to the interviews, and informed consent was obtained from them.

The interviews with the boys and their parents were largely organised through the children's lawyer. The principal at the school from which five of the boys came also aided in this process, as he made the school available to the researcher to be used as a meeting place and interview venue for the children as well as the three mothers. On all but one occasion the interviews took place in a classroom and on the other, one of the boys were interviewed in a guest room at a guest house that forms part of the property of the school. None of the interviews were conducted at the children's homes, as it was difficult to obtain permission from the farm owners to gain access to their properties.

The children were each interviewed individually with only the two interviewers present. This was the case for all of the other interviews. All interviews with the children and parents were conducted in Afrikaans, their mother-tongue.

A different arrangement was made with regard to the interviews conducted with other individuals, as mentioned earlier. The teachers of the five children were also interviewed at the school. These interviews were arranged by the school principal and took place in each teacher's classroom. The teacher of the child attending a different school was interviewed in the principal's office, as this was the venue made available to the researcher. All of these interviews were conducted in the teachers' mother-tongues: one in English, and the other four in Afrikaans. At times the Afrikaans-

speaking teachers would switch between English and Afrikaans, as they felt comfortable.

Table 1: Interviewees

Categories of Interview Subjects	Number of Interviews completed
Children	5
Parents	3 (mothers)
Teachers	5
Farm owners	1
Professional and other informants:	
○ Unrelated farm owner with training in psychology	1
○ Educational psychologist	1
○ School Lifeskills programme manager	1
○ Social worker	1
○ Health worker	1
○ Researcher – occupational health of farm workers	1

The farm owner with some training in psychology and the educational psychologist had a working relationship and were interviewed at the same time as they indicated that this would best suit their schedules. This interview took place in the farm owner's home on the farm estate.

The health worker and the social worker were interviewed on the farm on which they worked. The manager of the school programme afforded us an interview at his work place, and lastly, the medical expert was consulted in his office.

These interviews were conducted from the period of the 2 September 2004 till 23 February 2005. Arranging interviews was often a difficult and tedious process, as the children's parents were often not able to get time off from work and/or did not have the funds to travel to the interview venue. Time constraints as well as other impracticalities were also amongst the reasons for the limited number of interviews in each of the other areas. As far as the farm owners were concerned, only one was prepared to be interviewed, and for obvious reasons it would not have been possible or advisable to try and insist on such interviews.

Interviews with the children, their mothers and the children's teachers lasted about an hour to an hour and a half. Although the interviews were quite lengthy, this was necessary to ensure that the necessary information could be obtained in one interview. It was most often very difficult to secure a first meeting, and there would be no guarantee that the participant would come back for a second interview. It was always uncertain whether there would be another opportunity to continue the interview. The children did however get quite restless and would often seem to be losing concentration in the last fifteen minutes of the interview.

2.3.2 Data Capturing and Editing

All of the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

The ecological model guided the analysis. Specific factor groupings were probed for and investigated in the transcribed interviews. Despite what might appear to be a rather rigid method of analysis, the theoretical framework was merely the lens through which the data were viewed. The main steps, therefore still followed the basic pattern of content analysis of qualitative data. These included an initial reading and re-reading of the transcripts after which codes were developed. These codes, or segments of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994), are a way of breaking down the transcripts to make them more manageable to work with (Wengraf, 2001). Similar codes were then clustered to form the larger patterns or themes (Kvale, 1996). The qualitative data analysis computer package, QSR NVivo was used to aid the analysis process.

2.3.3 Shortcomings and Sources of Error

There are various factors that might have affected the quality of the data collected in this study.

Firstly, there were differences between myself and the interviewees. The two main differences were between the two interviewers (the researcher and the senior psychologist) and the primary interviewees (the children and their parents). These included the fact that both interviewers were first-language English speakers, whereas

all of the children and their parents were Afrikaans-speakers. The current researcher, although fluent in basic conversational Afrikaans, did not always express herself correctly in terms of grammar, which lowered the quality of the way in which the interview questions were asked. There was also the issue of class and education, as both interviewers were introduced to the children and their parents as doctors by the lawyer dealing with their criminal case. The lawyer did so of her own accord, and must have felt that it would be easier for the interviewees to understand the interviewers' role.

The fact that two interviewers were present at each interview, could have meant that the questions were asked in a more confusing way than if the current researcher had been conducting the interviews on her own.

CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The ecological model served as a useful starting point for analysing the information obtained in the interviews. Various factors located in the different levels of the model were identified. This chapter will detail these factors arranged within the structure of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. According to Belsky's (1980) interpretation of the ecological model, the aetiology of violence can be found at each level of the ecological system, with these levels interacting with and influencing one another. The levels include: the *individual*, *microsystemic*, *exosystemic*, and the *macrosystemic* level.

The focus will be on the microsystem and macrosystem levels, as it is within these contexts that most of the factors predisposing these boys to violence emerged. The discussion of these two levels will detail the inordinately violent nature of this farming community – the manner in which it sanctions, encourages, is desensitised to, and condones violence. It is because of the community in which these boys are socialised that they are distinguished, not from other children in their community, but other children in less violent communities. The community and set of cultural norms, beliefs and attitudes within which these children are embedded will allow us the best opportunities to make sense of their brutally violent acts.

The mesosystem will also be looked at, with attention being brought to the levels of community violence in this rural community. The alarming levels of inappropriate exposure to sexual acts and images are also detailed here. Exosystemic factors were not highlighted in interviews with participants, and so this level is not covered. Brief mention is made to the chronosystem through highlighting the main factor that has seemed to shape the Western Cape farming community over time.

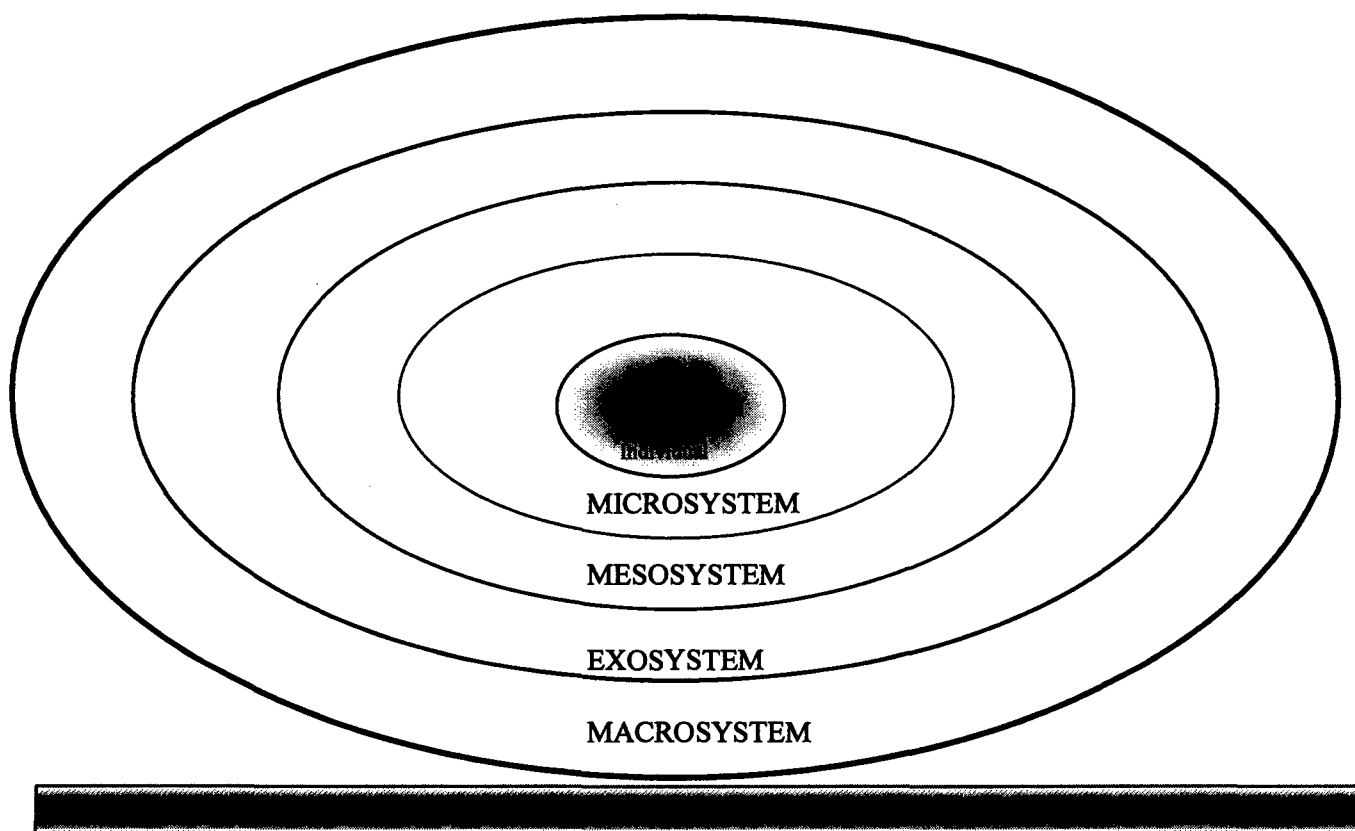


Figure 1: The Ecological Model

3.1 Individual Factors

A prior history of violence and poor academic achievement are well-known risk factors for violence (Farrington, 1989; Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002). These are also factors almost all of the boys in this study possessed along with most of their peers. Four out of the six boys in this study mentioned that they were violent with others (Boy 2 received hidings at school for fighting with school friends, Boy 4 said he hit his younger brothers “too much”, Boy 3 mentioned getting into fist fights with friends, and Boy 1 mentioned fighting with his younger cousins). The teachers of these four boys also complained of their violent behaviour, mentioning fighting with classmates (Boy 3, Boy 1, and Boy 2’s teacher), aggression (Boy 2), and bullying (Boy 1).

Most other children in this community, however, also have a history of violence and poor academic achievement. The rest of the children in this community, however, have also been described as very violent by many interviewed. For example, the social

worker said there was “a lot of fighting, bullying and hitting” amongst the farm children on the farm that she worked on. Another example came from a preschool teacher in the community who recalled an incident of a young girl who had to be convinced not to stab another girl. Lastly, the head of the lifeskills programme spoke extensively of the violence among the children in the community. He stated that brutal violence occurred on the school playground almost daily, that the kind of games children played were mostly violent games, often imitating wrestling moves they see from watching a weekly wrestling programme that is screened on television (“...they jump from the trees and the walls on each other. But it’s not the kind of violence that I was exposed to when I was at school... A child will think nothing of picking up a brick or a piece of wood and beating another child with it.”) He mentioned two specific incidents of violence between the school children, one of them (detailed in a later section) involving a teenage boy who was sexually and physically assaulted by his friends for not participating in a theft of a car radio. He required hospitalisation. The other incident involved a primary school girl who was accused of flirting with another girl’s boyfriend. Three girls tied her up and pushed the back end of a broom up and down her vagina and rectum.

Because most other children in this community also display these individually predisposing factors for violence, it is more interesting to consider the boys’ individual reactions and attitudes to their violent acts. Issues such as their lack of empathy with their victim and their unrealistic anticipation to the consequences of their actions will therefore be the focus of this section.

A final point to note, however, is that because the other children in this community were not studied, one cannot say with certainty that they do not also possess the characteristics that will now be discussed.

3.1.1 Lack of Empathy

All the boys showed a distinct lack of empathy for Boy X and the animals they killed. None of them expressed any sympathy for or empathy with their victims, and they displayed little remorse for their actions. The only regret they said they have was over

the fact that they had been caught and were awaiting punishment. Research has shown a connection between a lack of empathy in children and a display of violent tendencies (McDaniel, Balis, & Strahan, 1990; Orpinas, Parcel, McAlister, & Frankowski, 1995). For the purposes of this study, Cohen and Strayer's (1996) definition of empathy will be used. They define empathy as "the ability to understand and share in another's emotional state or context" (p. 988)

Boy 4 and Boy 1 articulated their view of Boy X at the time that the incident was occurring. They acknowledged that the child must have been in pain but that they did not see anything wrong with assaulting him.

TD²: You didn't think, „Oh, he's getting hurt“ and felt a bit sorry for him?

Boy 4: [shakes head]

TD: No one did?

Boy 4: [shakes head]

When asked about the buck, they also acknowledged that they knew they were in pain, stating that they bled and screamed. This indicates that even though they were able to imagine what the buck must have been feeling, it did nothing to trigger any sense that they should stop.

Boy 1: They weren't dead, they drowned in their own blood.

TD: Their little legs were still moving or were they still jumping around?

Boy 1: Their little legs were still moving.

TD: Was he (Boy X) bleeding?

Boy 3: [nods]

The lack of empathy displayed by the boys provides a significant clue in an attempt to analyse and understand how these events came about. Empathy has been linked to facilitating prosocial behaviour and reducing aggressive behaviour (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). Development of empathy, however, involves the child being exposed to certain factors (Barnett, 1987). These include secure early attachment to caretaker, parental affection, availability of empathic models, and parental use of an inductive

² "TD" refers to a senior psychologist who participated in and conducted some of the interviews.

socialisation technique (where the child is reprimanded by making the child aware of the victim's distress) (Barnett, 1987).

The question therefore is where could these boys have learned or observed such empathy. Their environments provide an unlikely arena in which they would learn to be affected by others' pain and suffering. The discussion will return to this theme under "Macrosystemic factors".

3.1.2 Moral Reasoning

Related to their lack of empathy is the way in which the boys viewed what they had done. None of them felt sorry for their victims (the buck and Boy X) at any time during the assault. Even though five months had passed by the time the boys were interviewed, none of them expressed any remorse that they had hurt the little boy or about killing the buck. They all could list reasons to justify harming Boy X ranging from he deserved it for threatening to tell on them to passing the blame to the oldest boy, Boy 1, by stating that he would have harmed them had they not gone through with it. They expressed regret only about the fact that they were now in trouble and faced punishment.

FG: And do you think it was wrong to hurt Boy X so?

Boy 1: Yes.

FG: And why do you think that that was wrong?

Boy 1: [pause]

TD: Because you and your friends got into trouble?

Boy 1: Yes.

FG: Is that the only reason? Are there any other reasons?

Boy 1: No.

TD: If you and your friends did those those things to the buck and to Boy X and you never got into any trouble for it, then would it have been okay? Or am I wrong about that?

Boy 1: That is right.

While they were committing the acts, their fears only centred on punishment and getting caught.

Boy 3: I didn't feel right about it. (Speaking of how he felt while killing the buck.)

TD: Why not?

Boy 3: Because they (his parents) would hit me

Boy 2: They (the buck) screamed.

TD: And how did their screaming make you feel? Did you feel excited?

Boy 2: I felt scared while they were screaming.

FG: Why?

Boy 2: I thought that the man over there (the security guard) would come and see what was making the noise.

According to Kohlberg's theory of moral development, the kind of moral reasoning the boys were displaying is preconventional reasoning, as they did not have an inherent sense that their actions were 'wrong', but only viewed it as wrong if it involved them being punished (Grant, 2002). This level of reasoning is said to occur in children younger than nine years old. It is also characteristic of offenders who have a significantly lower level of moral reasoning than non-offenders (Bartek, Krebs, & Taylor, 1993).

On expressing their fears of punishment, the boys also displayed very unrealistic ideas of what they predicted would be the result of their actions on the weekend in question.

3.1.3 Unrealistic Anticipated Consequences

Something else that was quite striking about the way in which the boys viewed what they had done was the unrealistic consequences they had anticipated would happen after. They all believed that they would either not be caught or that, if they did get caught, that they would only be given a punishment such as a hiding by their parents. The oldest boy in fact had forgotten his t-shirt at the scene of the crime, and yet he had still expressed that he believed that they would not get caught.

TD: Why did you do it if you thought that you would get caught? Or did you think that they would not catch you?

Boy 1: I thought they would not get us.

FG: Who did you think they would think had hurt Boy X?

Boy 1: We thought they would probably think someone else hurt him.

Here the boy expresses how he was not even aware that the police were there about the boy and buck when they arrived at their school the Monday following the violent events.

Boy 1: The Monday when we went to school, so they (the police) came to fetch us at the school.

TD: The police?

Boy 1: Yes.

TD: Were you scared?

Boy 1: I didn't know it was because of the buck.

To understand how these boys came to have these characteristics, one needs to study the environments in which they find themselves. It is therefore important to ensure that one does not decontextualise the child in trying to understand his behaviour.

3.2. Microsystem

The nature of interpersonal relations can often result in environments that increase the child's risk of engaging in violence as well as the development of at-risk individual characteristics (Krug et al., 2002). Violence is very much a way of life in this community, extending to the relationships and social interactions between its members (Waldman, 1995). This violence is therefore what these boys would be exposed to and involved in. The social worker interviewed attested to this saying that she has never encountered as much "latent aggression" in another community, despite having worked in other poverty-stricken communities. The lifeskills head also concurred this violence and believed that the problem was strongly influenced by lack of skills. He stated, "low levels of literacy is a problem and people aren't very eloquent and very few people resort to talking through problems."

This violent element was also true for the relationships that the children in this study had with the various role-players in their lives. Their primary relationships, namely with their family members and their peers and friends, all appeared to have a largely detrimental effect on their propensity for violence.

3.2.1 Family Influences

In Jonson-Reid's (1998) review of the link between childhood exposure to violence and youth becoming violent, she placed exposure to violence in the home (for example, domestic violence and child abuse) as a microsystemic factor. This conceptualisation will be used here.

Research strongly suggests that family variables are influential in determining violent behaviour in children. Studies done by Loeber and Dishion (1983) and Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber (1987) have found that relationships with family members and parenting practices strongly and consistently predict risk for antisocial behaviour.

There is a paucity of research in the area of the state of home environments for the children of farm workers. From what was said by interviewees, particularly the boys' teachers, it was clear that their interactions with their family members, particularly their parents have created an environment conducive to violent and aggressive behaviour.

Most of those interviewed could not comment in detail or at all on what happened in the boys' homes. Their teachers, the social worker and lifeskills programme head interviewed, however depicted the home environments of children on farms as a whole in a negative light. They stated that these families are characterised by violence and neglect and general parental apathy.

Teachers mentioned alcohol abuse as a problem plaguing most homes, as there is no other form of recreation on these farms, invariably resulting in violence in the home. One teacher said that she has consistently observed that the learners in her class are afraid to go home on Friday afternoons, as they know that drunken violence invariably ensues on weekends. The level of violence that they are exposed to was reported to be brutal and severe, including stabbings and shootings. One example given was of a girl who had witnessed her father stabbing her mother with a knife. One teacher stated that she felt that many children were not adequately supervised and

were neglected when the parents were drunk and that most of the parents were poor role models to their children.

The head of the lifeskills programme as well as a health worker on one of the farms also believed that the children in this community were being exposed to very high levels of violence on a daily basis (mainly fathers physically abusing their mothers) and that evidence of this is the violence children act out on the school playground.

Two teachers commented specifically on their perception of the home lives of two of the boys in this study. Boy 3's teacher felt that he was being neglected at home. She also made reference to a comment a psychologist, who worked with Boy 3, said his mother once made indicating that she did not think the boy's mother cared enough for him. She felt that Boy 3 was not adequately supervised, as there is no one to look after him after school. She believed that this was at the root of why he was involved in the violence in this case. Boy 6's teacher stated that she understood that he had been physically abused by his father who also forced him to leave home, leaving the boy homeless for a period of time.

In interviews with the children in this study, they did reveal that violence was occurring in the home. This included Boy 1's father physically fighting with Boy 1, his brother and mother; Boy 2's parents have fought with knives on more than one occasion when they have been drunk, sometimes including the children; Boy 6's guardian's partner fights with her when drunk. The only acknowledgement of violence in the home reported by the boys' mothers, however, was one mother who admitted to using corporal punishment on her children. It is difficult to ascertain if they were being transparent about this or not. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, however, it is likely that they were not.

Factors that consistently came through in interviews with all of the interviewees regarding the interactions in the home were family violence, parental neglect and physical abuse. These along with other issue of poor parenting, best illustrated in the form of lack of parental monitoring and supervision, will now be discussed.

3.2.1.1 Family Violence and Conflict

Disharmony and violence in the home have been associated with violent and antisocial behaviour in children (e.g. Brewer, Hawkins, Catalano, & Neckerman, 1995; Dahlberg & Potter, 2001; O'Keefe, 1994; Scholte, 1992). Amongst the children in this case, all of them reported the occurrence of family violence, with violence between parents being the most commonly reported example.

As with all other instances of violence on the farms, alcohol was often reported as the catalyst to physical fights between parents.

FG: And normally after a while (of drinking) they (parents) start to fight?

Boy 1: Yes.

FG: What do you do then?

Boy 1: Then I leave home and go somewhere else.

FG:...and how do they become if they drink?

Boy 2: They begin to start fighting.

The severity of violence included fist-fights with blood flowing as well as stabbings, as reported by Boy 1 and Boy 2.

Boy 4 and Boy 1's teacher believed that there was a tremendous amount of violence occurring on weekends in her learners' homes, as some would make up excuses on Friday afternoons (headaches, etc) to avoid going home and they would display a lot more aggression than usual on Mondays.

The second most prevalent kind of family violence that was reported in interviews with the boys was violence between siblings. Boy 1 reported that his older brothers are physically violent with him, but by far the most extreme report of violence was what was mentioned by Boy 2. The boy had his middle finger dismembered at the joint. On being questioned about this, he stated "*My brother chopped it off*". His brother had apparently chopped off half of his finger, as Boy 2 had refused to give his (Boy 2's) food to him:

Boy 2: He became angry beacuse I didn't give him any food."

He was a toddler at the time of the incident, and his brother was eight years old.

Given the child's reported age at the time of this incident, the reliability and accuracy of his report was questioned. On questioning his mother regarding this incident, however, she confirmed this story.

FG: We heard, Boy 2 told us how his one finger was chopped off.

Boy 2's mother: [Laughs]. It was his brother, I was at work, it was Andries.

TD: Andries chopped it off?.

Boy 2's mother [laughs while talking]: Yes, Sir.

The mother's laughter at remembering this occurrence was very significant, as it seemed to reflect her attitude toward violence. Her light-hearted way of recalling this incident indicated an attitude of taking a rather serious offence by her older child on her younger one very lightly. It would therefore appear that she did not view what Boy 2's brother had done as particularly deviant or punishable. Her attitude could therefore have communicated to Boy 2 that violence is not a big issue of concern; and that it can be tolerated and engaged in quite freely.

Whilst not speaking of these children's parents in particular, both a teacher at a crèche in the area (and a member of the community) and the lifeskills programme head commented on the effects of exposure to interparental violence on their children. They both felt that children's violent behaviour at school was modelled on observed behaviour in the children's homes.

Lifeskills Head: And I think this kind of behaviour is being modelled. And that kind of fighting and violence happens on the farm and is perpetuated here at school. ...Obviously what happens on the playground is a spin-off of what's happening at home and what's been happening at home, I think, it is inherited over the years. Unemployment, poverty, low levels of literacy.

All of these reports are in keeping with the literature. For example, in their analysis of sibling violence, Hoffman, Kiecolt, and Edwards (2005) established a link between interparental violence, negative parent-child interactions, and problematic sibling relations. They found that all of these factors predicted sibling violence.

3.2.1.2 Physical Harm

It would not be prudent to state that the boys in this study had experienced physical abuse in their families, as there was no direct evidence of such abuse. Statements made in the interviews with the boys, their teachers and their parents do however indicate that these boys are experiencing some level of physical harm in their homes at the hands of their parents, siblings, or both.

The main example of physical harm came from the boys receiving hidings from their parents (especially their fathers), often when the parent was drunk. The extent of the violence reported was as severe as stabbings with knives:

Boy 6's teacher: ...his father used to get a bit violent with him and used to hit him and um...

FG: ...and what happens, what is the fighting like (in the home)...

Boy 2: With knives.

FG: With knives? Has your mother stabbed your brother with a knife?

Boy 2: Hm-m. Almost.

Physical abuse, such as excessive and harsh physical beatings, was reported to occur at the hands of a stepfather. This is reportedly a common occurrence in the homes of farm worker families where the father-figure in the house is not the child's biological father.

Boy 4's mother: I will hit them, I will do it! I will not allow it that he (Boy 4's step-father) hits them.

FG: Why not?

Boy 4's mother: No, I know that Boy 4 is not his real child; he will hit him like ... I will not allow that he puts his hands on him.

It further indicates that there are times when a few factors are at play (other than disobedience on the part of the child) when a parent is meting out punishment. The line between disciplining children by means of corporal punishment and causing severe injury appears to be unclear to many farm workers.

The last kind of report of physical abuse reported by Boy 6 involved the boy being hit while trying to protect his foster mother from intimate partner violence.

FG: And does he (the foster mother's partner) fight with your mother?

...

Boy 6: Just sometimes. Sometimes then I even try and stop my father, "Leave my mother alone!"

FG: And then does he hit you?

...

Boy 6: He does sometimes do it.

These reports of physical assault in the home are significant, as it seriously impairs a child's development. A review of available literature regarding physically abused children reveals that they are more likely to display delinquent and seriously violent behaviour during adolescence (Huizinga, Loeber, & Thornberry, 1994; Thornberry, Huizinga, & Loeber, 1995), and to exhibit aggression in school and community settings (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1998; Shields & Cicchetti, 1998). Physical abuse has also been linked to cognitive delays and poor academic functioning (Margolin & Gordis, 2000). Only one of the six boys in this study was in the appropriate grade for his age, while the rest of them had repeated at least one grade. The role that being physically harmed in their homes plays in this cannot be ignored.

3.2.1.3 Parental Neglect

Numerous statements by the teachers, social worker and lifeskills head seem to point to what could be considered the presence of neglect in some of these boys' homes. Whilst there is still much difficulty in both recognizing as well as operationally defining neglect, the lack of provision of basic needs will simply be used for the purposes of this study.

Much of the reported neglect by teachers, the social worker and lifeskills programme head related to all the children in general in this community. As mentioned before, this was due to the fact that they could not know with certainty what was happening in these boys' homes. They said that neglect was often connected to alcohol abuse amongst the adults on farms. Although alcohol abuse will be covered in more detail

further on in this chapter, it is necessary now to discuss it in terms of its link with parental neglect. Besides the negative impact that the resultant violence of alcohol abuse must have on the children, there were reports by a teacher of one of the boys and the social worker that it often translates into children being left without adequate supervision, their basic needs (of meals and hygiene) neglected, or being caught in the middle of violent fights. Although the reports are not specifically related to these boys, they are still valuable, as they indicate the norm in this community. It is therefore very likely that the same is happening in the homes of at least some of these boys.

Reports of this neglect include the fact that the children hate the festive season, as it is a time that drunkenness prevails amongst adults (stated by the lifeskills programme head). The social worker stated that she is aware of children drifting around on the farm trying to escape the drink-related violence, congregating at "safe houses" (homes where the parents do not drink and where they can find a meal). She also reported how the children have told her that they hate weekends and they tend to make sure they are not home then to avoid the ensuing violence. A teacher spoke of her fears of consequences of parents being in a drunken stupor, stating that she fears the kind of danger children are in when their parents are unable to supervise and protect them.

Neglect was not always clearly related to drinking but an example of the worst and most extreme example of neglect amongst the boys was Boy 6's situation. In an interview with a teacher, she stated that in the last few years he had been put out of the house by his father, leaving him homeless, living in any shelter he could find (chicken shed, abandoned car, squatter camps) and fending for himself. He was eventually taken in by another farm worker who took pity on him.

Another reported form of neglect that was the apparent lack of investment in the children's education displayed by parents. This was mentioned in the interview with a teacher and with the social worker. The social worker stated that the reason for the development of an after-school care centre on the farm on which she worked was to address the problem of learners not doing their homework at home.

Social Worker: ...because the parents don't place any kind of importance...on schooling. So they weren't doing homework at home.

The teacher spoke of how she, as well as Boy 4's previous teachers, have never seen his parents and she feels that they have absolutely no investment in the child's school life.

FG: Why do you think that he (Boy 4) is weak in his school work? What is his problem?

Boy 4's and Boy 1's teacher: ...he doesn't really get any support at home. His parents are not at all interested in anything. I have still never seen Boy 4's mother and it's his third year with us (the school) and I still haven't seen them (Boy 4's parents).

Numerous studies have shown that rejection, neglect, or indifference from parents increases the risk for aggressive and antisocial behaviour (Kruttschnitt, Ward & Scheble, 1987; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986; Widom, 1989a, 1989b) as well as crime and violence in children (Yoshikawa, 1994). There is also much evidence linking aggressive and antisocial behaviour in children and poor parental supervision (Farrington, 1978, 1989, 1994; Gorman-Smith, Tolan, Zelli & Huesmann, 1996; McCord, 1979; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Rutter, 1985; Scholte, 1992). So much so, in fact, that Scholte (1992) lists poor supervision as one of the main risk factors to be found in the literature.

In addition to influences posed by the family, the role played by relationships with peers is widely acknowledged as a powerful determinant of aggressive behaviour in children (e.g. Dishion, Andrews, & Crosby, 1995; Elliott, Huizinga, & Ageton, 1985). This is the topic of discussion in the next section.

3.2.2 Peer Influences

Research has found the role of peers in children and adolescents' lives to be highly influential (Dishion et al., 1995; Elliott et al., 1985; Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; Henry, Tolan, & Gorman-Smith, 2001; Thornberry et al., 1995). Youth are much more likely to engage in deviant activities when those behaviours are encouraged and approved by their peers (Thornberry et al., 1995).

If one considers that violence is the norm in this community, it would appear that in friendship-formation, these children do not have many other peers besides the "delinquent" kind to choose from. As is consistent with the literature, their peers do

tend to have a negative effect on them in that they encourage them to engage in deviant acts.

Interviews with the parents, teachers, the social worker, the lifeskills programme head, and the boys in this study, focusing on this aspect of the children's lives, revealed that much negative and violent interaction took place in their peer groups. In particular, the threatening and coercive presence of the oldest boy was a prominent and constant feature in interviews. The two most salient areas to emerge from these interviews and that will be discussed are *gang culture* and the presence of *the peer leader*.

3.2.2.1 Gang Culture

A note on delinquency in this context is pertinent at this point. Labelling theory provides the most appropriate way to understand deviance in the farming context. Labelling theory posits that acts are not inherently deviant but rather that the categories of deviance reflects the power structure in society (Giddens, 2006). In the case of the boys in this study, violent acts that may be labelled as deviant happen on a wide-spread and daily basis. Why then were the specific acts in this study categorised as deviant? According to this theory, factors such as the fact that the buck that were killed were the farmer's property and that the events in question received media attention would be very influential in determining this labelling. This reflects the power structure at play that labelling theory mentions. In this case, namely the power that their parents and the farm owner hold over these boys. It is important to bear in mind that when the term deviant is used in this study, it does not necessarily mean that these children's acts are any different to what most of this community's members engage in.

The very fact that the criminal acts that are the focus here were committed in a group speaks of a culture of "gang" or group delinquency amongst the children on these farms. Delinquency has repeatedly been identified as a group phenomenon (Elliott et al., 1985; Reiss, 1986).

In the time that the interviews were conducted, numerous incidents of gang youth violence, strikingly similar to this case, were reported in this community pointing to a pattern of such violence. The lifeskills head alone reported of five similar incidents occurring on just one of the farms in the area over the course of one year. He also pointed out that these five incidents were in a school that has a population of fewer than 500 children.

The first example is the case of Isaac Muggels, an eight-year old boy from Blackheath in Kuils River who was brutally murdered by four boys in December of 2003 (Fortein, 2004; Lloyd, 2004; Schronen, 2004). The attack involved the boy being brutally assaulted (using bricks, an iron bar, a plank, and throttling him to the extent that the bones in his throat were crushed) rendering him unconscious. The following morning the boys returned to load his unconscious but still breathing body into a dinghy, which they capsized into the farm dam, drowning Isaac. All four of the boys, aged between seven and 10, were Isaac's friends, with one being his cousin. The reason for his murder was an argument that Isaac got into with the boys, which turned violent.

The second case occurred just a week or two before the interviews were conducted. It involved a brutal assault on a learner at the school that five out of the six boys attend. This incident, like the Muggels case, had similarities to the current case under study. It involved a grade seven learner who had been so severely physically assaulted that he required hospitalisation. The child had been beaten, stabbed in the ear, sodomised, had an iron bar stuck in his rectum tearing his bladder, and eventually was rendered unconscious. Once again, the perpetrators were the victim's friends. The reasons given for the assault varied slightly, ranging from he had not been willing to go along with his friends' plans to steal a car radio, to that he had threatened to report this theft to the relevant authorities.

The third incident was a more recent one, and involved the murder of eight-year old Wilfred Kriel by his 12- and seven-year old schoolmates ("Axe-murder", 2007; Makwabe, 2007; Prince, 2007). They tied his feet with dog chains and murdered him with an axe and fan belt. The little boy died of skull fractures. The alleged motive for the murder was five Rands that Wilfred owed them as well as some raisins. The incident took place in Klawer, near Clanwilliam, in the Western Cape.

The fact that antisocial acts often take place within a group in this community is significant, as it speaks of a cultural endorsement of violence and criminal acts (if only among the youth). The boys in this study would therefore have been exposed to the sanctioning of such deviant acts their entire lives (through witnessing and engaging in antisocial acts committed in groups).

The influence that peers have had on each of these boys came up strongly throughout the process of this study. There are reports from the children, their mothers, as well as their teachers of negative peer influence in their lives. In particular, all of them mentioned the oldest boy's coercive influence as the reason behind the rest of the boys' involvement in the violent episodes that make up this case. This is the basis for discussion in the next section.

3.2.2.2 Peer Leader

In the discussion of this case with interviewees, Boy 1 was always mentioned as the leader and mastermind behind the events. Everyone agreed this was the case, including Boy 1 himself. He was the oldest child in this group at 13 years old, and was singled out as a particularly deviant influence and a known bully by parents, teachers, and some of the boys.

His teacher reported that he was a bully at school. Also supporting this claim is Boy 3's mother's report that just weeks prior to the case, Boy 3 has been badly physically assaulted by Boy 1. She therefore felt this enough proof that Boy 3 must have been coerced into participating in that weekend's events. Boy 6 confirmed that Boy 1 had assaulted Boy 3.

Many of the parents and teachers interviewed stated that he was generally a bad influence, not only on these boys but other friends. It is because of fear of his negative influence that Boy 1's teacher said she moved him away from sitting next to another boy in this case, his classmate, Boy 5. Boy 4 also reported that his mother did not like him playing with Boy 1, as she felt he might coerce Boy 4 into delinquent deeds.

On questioning the children and their mothers as to why they think Boy 1 was the leader and why the other boys obeyed him so diligently, the boys and the mothers all stated that Boy 1 was a child that used fear, coercion, and intimidation to make sure the rest of the children did as instructed. The children confirmed these mothers' suspicions, as they all stated that Boy 1 bullied them into participating.

While many factors do point to Boy 1's negative and dominating influence on the rest of these boys, one has to be mindful of the fact that these boys had all spoken to lawyers and policemen many times by the time they were interviewed. It is therefore impossible to rule out that Boy 1's part in this case was being inflated by the other boys and their mothers to some degree.

3.2.3 School

The overwhelming majority of learners that attended the school that five out of the six boys studied attended were the children of farm workers. The school which Boy 6 attended also had a substantial population of children who lived on farms in the area. Teachers, children and the lifeskills head reported very high levels of violence and aggression being displayed at school by learners in general. The reports were of violence that goes beyond a playground squabble; incidents involving stabbings with pens; throwing bricks at each other's heads; mimicking actions seen from watching wrestling on television (body slams, jumping from trees and walls on to each other); and beating each other with planks or bricks.

Not only does this very violent behavior displayed at school confirm that the children in this community are being exposed to very high levels of violence at home, it also provides evidence that the boys in this case are not unique or different to the rest of the children in their neighbourhood with this display of violent behavior. It appears that any other group of children from this community could have committed these acts, and it is basically chance that it was these six particular boys. The "tipping points", if they were any, would be negligible, for example factors such as having an older boy in the group leading things, and the fact that this leader had what appears to

be the most violent home with parents who drink the most and supervise him very little.

Resilience theory (Bernard, 1991) states that certain protective factors present in a child's environment partly shield some children from the effects of violence. Examples of these are "involvement in productive, meaningful activities, the presence of one or more supportive adults in their lives, and higher expectations from those around them" (Fields & McNamara, 2003, p.65). From this discussion of the children's microsystem, it is clear that there are very few, if any, of these protective factors operating in their lives. This further sheds light on their violent behaviour.

3.3. Mesosystem

The individuals in the study displayed many of the individual and microsystemic predisposing factors for violent behaviour. These factors however are also present in children from the same community, who did not exhibit such violent behaviours. These predisposing factors found at an individual level therefore are not very good at predicting violent behaviour in specific individuals. Factors found at the community and cultural levels of the mesosystem, and then the macrosystem, hold more insight and important contextual background for understanding this puzzling event.

Once again, the way in which Jonson-Reid (1998) conceptualises an ecological-based risk model will be used. She classes community violence as a mesosystemic factor, as it influences the home environment. In addition, both the community and the family are contexts that contain the child.

The boys' neighbourhoods in which they live, like their relationships, significantly contribute to their violent behaviours and to understanding this case. This is because the social ecology of the processes of a particular community as well as its structural characteristics has an important impact on the violence that a child is exposed to by affecting other microsystems (Gorman-Smith et al., 2000; Tolan et al., 2003). Examples of this include the effect that community contexts can have on the child's

family, the role it plays in determining the kinds of peer circles s/he moves in, as well as the kinds and frequency of violence that s/he is exposed to (Krug et al., 2002).

The main feature of this neighbourhood that are most likely contributing to this environment that breeds violence in children is the extremely high levels of *community violence*. Another feature of this community, not as noteworthy as the community violence, but still worthy of mention given the sexual acts that form part of this case is the high occurrence of inappropriate exposure to sexual acts and images.

3.3.1. Community Violence

Farm communities have alarmingly high rates of violence (Fredericks & Lopes, 2006; HRW, 2001; Shabodien, 2006; Sunde & Kleinbooi, 1999; Waldman, 1995), beyond that of many neighbourhoods in the already notoriously violent country that South Africa is. Children living on farms are therefore exposed to extraordinary levels of brutal violence.

All interviewed reported these extremely high levels of violence on the farms on which the boys live, especially on weekends when binge-dinking of alcohol occurred. Even the children's mothers acknowledged the dangers present in their neighbourhoods, as they said that they feared for their children's safety when their children were out on their own.

The significance of this exposure to community violence is the research that has confirmed that this exposure, particularly the witnessing of personal victimisation, is highly correlated with youth perpetration of violence (Brewer et al., 1995; Feigelman, Howard, Li, & Cross, 2000; Malik, Sorenson, & Aneshensel, 1997). Regarding the interaction between community violence and the child's microsystemic domain of the home Margolin (1998) found that community violence was one of the factors that negatively affected parents' abilities to see to their children's physical and emotional needs.

3.3.2 Sexual Exposure

Another factor common to many of the children's lives in this community is that of being exposed to and witnessing inappropriate sexual situations.

The level of sexual exposure that the children who live on farms, which the boys in this case are from, was striking. The school lifeskills head, the creche teacher (at the same school), a few of the boys' teachers and one of the boys all related that all these children, not just these boys, were exposed to unhealthy and inappropriate sexual images and experiences, including sexual abuse and child prostitution.

Teachers and the lifeskills programme head reported that exposure to naked adults or adults engaging in sexual acts happened because of overcrowding, not having toilet facilities ("you've got to sit under the tree or in the open and you see adults urinate or defecate" – lifeskills head); drunken parents who are not mindful of appropriate behaviour and so engage in sexual activities in front of or even with their children ("...if I am drunk, then I don't care what I do with my children" – crèche teacher); or allowing the children to watch television with sexually explicit material ("...the parents watch it with them...there's dances here on the farm, but the dance will stop when that programme comes on and everybody will stop dancing and watch" - lifeskills programme head).

The head of the lifeskills programme said that children are behaving sexually inappropriately at school (from touching each other's genitals to engaging in sexual intercourse), and that it is a part of what he has to address in his programme. Examples of the sexual behaviour children are exhibiting at this school include:

Lifeskills Head: Little boys lying on little girls...doing sexual movements...making sexual assault threats "I will rape you right now!"...a 4-year old boy wanting to suck another boy's penis...he said "The people do naughty things on (channel name); I watch (channel name) every Friday"... They think nothing of touching one each other or fiddling with one another.

TD: in school time?

Lifeskills Head: In school, yes.

Lifeskills Head: Even in the past when I've come here to the kitchen to make coffee, there were groups of youngsters getting it on.

TD: Do you mean boys or girls?

Lifeskills Head: These were boys and girls.

TD: having intercourse?

Lifeskills Head: Yes.

Teacher:...a little girl was molested when she was in Grade one or two...she had apparently tried to rape a little boy this year.

Lastly, one of the boys in this case reported having already witnessed a child push a stick up another child's anus (in the manner that the boys in this case had done).

All of these reports are in keeping with Levine's (2002) findings that it was evident that many of the children she came across (who all lived in Rawsonville, Western Cape), were victims of rape and other forms of physical and emotional abuse.

The likelihood that these boys in the case had been exposed to inappropriate sexual behaviour is very high. When one adds to the picture factors such as the fact that Boy 2 reported witnessing a child pushing a stick up another child's anus, his teacher reports him making inappropriate sexual remarks in class indicative of some sort of inappropriate sexual exposure, in addition to the brutal sexual assault that the boys inflicted on the victim in this case, it provides us with enough to conclude that at least a few of the boys have been exposed to inappropriate sexual behaviour. In addition, one cannot rule out the possibility either that one or more of them had experienced some form of sexual abuse.

The mesosystemic interaction between this sexual exposure and the children's homes is once again illustrated in Margolin's (1998) findings that child sexual abuse was also a factor found to negatively affect quality of parenting.

3.4. Macrosystem

In this section the “societal blueprint” that is the macrosystem will be explored. The beliefs, ideologies, attitudes and norms that this farming community holds regarding violence will be explored, as well as the community’s material resources.

3.4.1 Poverty

The factor that stands out most regarding this community’s material resources is its lack of such resources. Farm worker communities in South Africa, including those in the Western Cape, have historically been stuck in a cycle of poverty and this continues to this day (Du Toit, 2004). Economic exploitation of farm workers still continues in one form or the other (despite the great strides that have been made in labour legislation in the last decade). An example of this uncovered in interviews was mentioned by the lifeskills head, namely that he was aware of workers who were paid R5 a day for picking grapes when the law specified a minimum of R70 a day. Poverty along with its spin-off effects has to be acknowledged and factored in when understanding this case.

There is a plethora of research on the negative social effects of poverty. Amongst the commonly cited consequences is juvenile delinquency and violent behaviour in children and adolescents (Krug et al., 2002). Children who live in poverty have been proven to be predictive of violence and aggression, violent offending, abandoning education, and becoming teenage parents (Farrington, 1989; National Research Council, 1993).

3.4.2 Alcohol

Farms in the Western Cape are notorious for having the highest alcohol abuse rates in the world. This is not surprising, as studies done on farm worker communities reveal that alcohol abuse is simply an unwavering part of daily life on farms (e.g. London, 1999, 2000). Earlier statistics have shown that around 60% of farm workers suffer from alcoholism (London, 1999). In London’s (2000) study he found that 87 and 65%

of participants respectively indicated problem drinking and almost half of the sample consumed unsafe (>210 g) and 9.3% dangerous amounts (>490 g) of alcohol per week. Levels of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome in the Western Cape are also the highest in the world (May et al., 2000).

It is well-known that alcohol intoxication increases one's susceptibility for becoming violent (Bushman & Cooper, 1990; Murdoch, Pihl, & Ross, 1990). It is therefore understandable that alcohol-induced violence is a huge problem in this community and that these two factors are inextricably linked. Alcohol abuse is a key underpinning of domestic or interpersonal violence in farm settings (London, 1999; Waldman, 1993, 1995). A clear indication of the connection with violence is the fact that more than 60% of rural traumatic injuries are alcohol-related (London, 2003). The children in these rural farm families are therefore exposed to an inordinate amount of violence.

On the farms from which these children come, the fact that violence was largely caused through being inebriated was stated over and over again in interviews. Most of the boys also stated that their parents engaged in violence when drunk, stating that they "go crazy" (gaan tekere) and stab each other with knives. The boys also reported witnessing fights that occur when their neighbours are drunk.

3.4.3 Reduced Inhibitions toward Violence

Through the interviews it was consistently revealed that the norms and beliefs held in this farm dweller community not only condones violent behaviour, but also encourages and rewards it through some or other means. A desensitisation to violence manifesting in reduced inhibitions against violence is a prominent feature amongst the members of this community.

Regarding the extent of the violence, it was mentioned that there is latent aggression constantly hanging in the air (social worker), that there was so much violence occurring that it was also acted out at school to the extent that teachers do not know how to handle the violence out of fear of getting harmed themselves. Lastly, Boy 6's

teacher reported that she felt that the children she encountered at her school were very aggressive, and did not hesitate at all to become violent.

The kind of violent behaviour most often included stabbings and there was more than one report of this. Violence that commonly takes place between children included the “hitting game”, which took place on weekends and was described by more than one of the boys. It involved children waiting about for people to walk by and as they did they would beat them up with weapons such as iron bars. Other weapons mentioned that are used in fights include axes, which has more credibility if one considers the case of Wilfred Kriel (who was murdered with an axe by his peers).

Violence between the children could be to such an extent that parents who come to hear of it are afraid to intervene in case it results in their child being further assaulted as punishment for this.

Boy 3's mother: [pause]. No, I then just left the letter. Because they don't care, you see, I am afraid that they might hurt him in the bus (school bus), or something like that. Look, I don't know what today's children are like, they grow up in a rougher way. They can easily hurt him, or push him out of the bus or something, or maybe make him run in the road and then a car knocks him over.

Lastly, the ultimate illustration of a desensitivity to violent acts was the fact that the boys in this case in fact planned to murder Boy X (Boy 1 admitted to this). He said, however, that they later changed their minds about doing so.

This desensitisation was described by the lifeskills head as the following:

Lifeskills Head: I'm almost inclined to say that the children have been exposed so often through so many different agencies so frequently that they have been desensitised. They see it as they're growing up as infants. You sleep in the same bedroom as your parents, you see it outside, you watch it on television. And you'll notice, my experience when children have spoken about this, their affect is blunt.

The disinhibition of violent tendencies seems to result in an almost automatic response to conflict with violence.

Social Worker: We had one of the young boys who was about eight threatening one of the crèche staff with a real gangster knife, one of those double-edged things, because he had hurt

a little one, she had moaned at him, so he ran off and came back with one of those carnivore knives. It's got a blade on each side; apparently the purpose is that you can go up and then come down again.

3.4.4 Violent Resolution of Conflict

Another aspect of the way in which this community related to violence that stood out was the way in which violence was used as the first and only means of resolving conflict. This was true for both adults and children. The lifeskills head suggested that this is so prevalent, as members of the community have very low literacy levels and struggle to articulate their feelings making it much easier to simply beat someone into submission in an argument.

Countless incidents were mentioned throughout the course of the interviews of adults using violence to settle arguments. These most often revolved around alcohol and the general scenario was being drunk (and therefore less inhibited toward violence) and fighting over the alcohol itself or money.

Children were not only witnessing this common use of violence, but were being encouraged to get involved in physical fights from a young age. A crèche teacher in the community illustrates this in her description of adults' common reaction to their children's violent behaviour:

Crèche Teacher: And then we laugh about it too, No man, but he's so cute, look how he's hitting Grant''.

3.4.5 Male Dominance over Women

There is much documented evidence of violence from men toward women (Fredericks & Lopes, 2006; Sunde & Kleinbooi, 1999; Waldman, 1995). In Waldman's (1995) sociological study she found that there were extreme levels of domestic violence and sexual abuse toward women and adolescent girls, violence used by both owners and workers to control women's labour and sexuality, and that violence tends to have sexual undercurrent. Sunde and Kleinbooi's (1999) study of Western Cape farms revealed that 67% of the 112 farmers interviewed acknowledged that domestic

violence occurred on the farms. In the study conducted by Fredericks and Lopes (2006), also conducted on Western Cape farms, they found that a third of the women surveyed had experienced sexual harassment.

Participants in the current study, particularly the boys, the lifeskills head, and the teachers, also gave many examples of such violence between domestic partners. The indicator that for men to be abusive toward women is a norm in this community is the fact that these incidents are largely not reported, as they are seen as family concerns.

This seeming acceptance of women abuse is viewed by Waldman (1995) as a union of the dependence and violence in relationships – between farm owner and farm worker and then also man and woman. The two live quite happily in the same relationship and does not make the women in these situations question their partners' love for them.

Understanding the abuse is not difficult when one considers the way in which men are socialised in this community. There is a stereotypical view of what a man is, namely a real man is violent, drinks excessive amounts of alcohol, and they dominate and show their female partners who holds the power and control in their relationships. This stereotype is set, and those men who do not fit this mould are often ostracised as a result.

This stereotype of a man is pushed on to boys from a very early age. They are taught that real men are violent and resolve conflict violently.

Teacher: And boys are not allowed to cry. If a boy cries, he will even get a hiding for it, because he's a boy. He shouldn't cry because something made him sad or if others fought with him, he is not allowed to cry, he must hit back.

These boys therefore have very poor role models, meaning that they do not have any buffers to off-set the effects of the many other violence-predisposing factors in their environments (Dahlberg & Potter, 2001). They are also not exposed to any prosocial means of resolving conflict.

It is important to note at this point that one interviewee's (Boy 1's) older brother had allegedly stabbed and drowned another young man from the community at the time of the case. Boy 1, the boy labeled by his teachers and some parents as the most violent of the boys, had this brother, in addition to his father, who he acknowledged as being very violent, as his role-models. This also hints at the kind of violence Boy 1 and his brother are exposed to if both of them emerge from the same home as violent individuals.

The head of the school's social programme works with many of the older boys at the school that the boys in this study attend. He stated that the boys he works with have a lot of sadness around their fathers' chronic drunkenness and physical abuse of their mothers and other family members.

These violent men in this community command not only fear but a certain amount of respect and admiration, especially in men and boys. As a result, they also serve as very influential, albeit detrimental, role models to these boys.

3.5. Chronosystem

3.5.1 Tot System

The aspect of these boys' chronosystem that stands out most is related to their communities. An institution that has served to shape and fundamentally define the farming community in the Western Cape is the *tot system*. The tot system was a method of payment used by farmers since colonial settlement in the Cape Colony. Although eventually officially abolished in 1962 (van Rhyneveld, 1986), the legacy of institutionalising alcohol abuse on farms is strongly felt, as residual patterns and practices of heavy drinking is still very much part of farm life. It is widely acknowledged and accepted that the tot system played an integral role in the widespread alcohol abuse that exists on farms in the Western Cape today. London (2000), for example, found that farm workers who had previously worked on a farm that employed the *tot system* were 9.8 times less likely to abstain from drinking alcohol than those without exposure to the DOP system.

The crèche teacher and lifeskills head interviewed were of the opinion that practice of the tot system was still occurring in some form or the other in today's farming community.

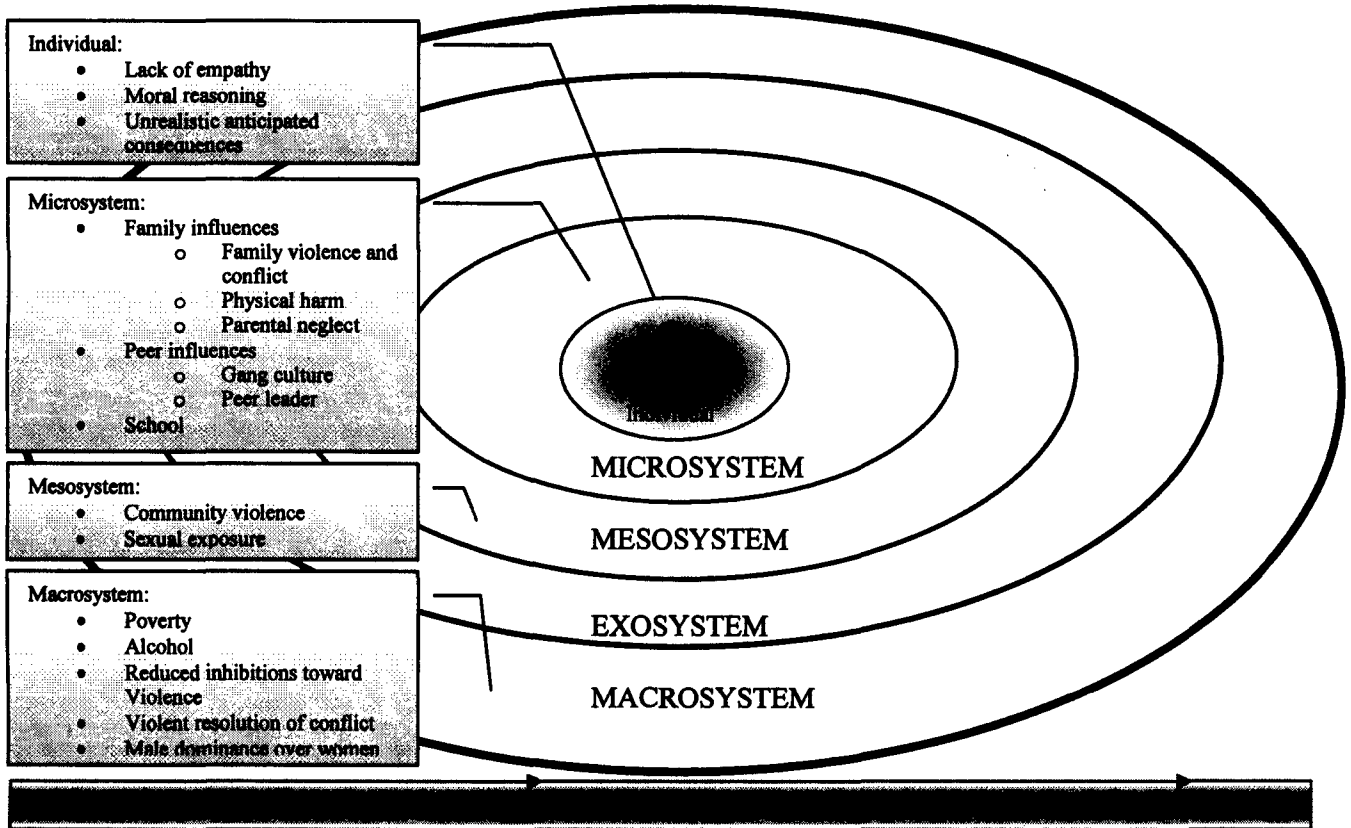


Figure 2: Ecological Model Displaying Findings

This chapter has attempted to present the findings of this study and ascribe meaning to them through using the levels of the ecological model. Through looking at the boys in this study according to these levels, the main finding has been that their environments have been instrumental in moulding them into the individuals who murdered 18 buck and severely assaulted a little boy. While the question at the beginning of this study was why these boys would have committed these acts, the data have changed this question into, why would they not commit these violent acts considering the violent homes and community within which they are embedded.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was an attempt to understand and give meaning to the brutal and violent acts of six boys. Although it is doubtful whether one will be able ultimately to explain their gruesome and extremely cruel acts to everyone's satisfaction, this investigation nevertheless drew attention to factors that often are overlooked when faced with events like this. Although what they did at first glance seemed like an aberration, it turned out that their acts were not that unusual within the spectrum of behaviour regarded as "normal" in their community. Indeed, there have been other (more severe) acts of violence committed by children ('Kids axed pal', 2007; Schronen, 2004) and adults, and more "minor" acts of violence are an everyday norm. The social context (family and community) that helped shape these boys and this incident, have to be looked at as carefully and as critically as the boys themselves.

As stated previously, the concept of "generalisability" has to be approached from a slightly different angle when looking at the findings of this study (Yin, 1998). While this study does not necessarily tell us anything about average South African children, a "level two inference" can be made about other children who have committed violent acts and who live in a similarly violent context. This ties in with the researcher's point that these boys could have been any other six children from this community. Because this neighbourhood is so violent, had another group of children from this community committed these acts, it is very likely that the findings on studying them would be much the same.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model has been particularly useful in this study, as it allowed for a consideration of both the children and their context. It was ideally suited to dealing with such a complicated, unusual situation and allowed for a thorough, in-depth investigation of this case in its full complexity. This study has therefore made extensive use of Bronfenbrenner's theory in formulating the results and discussion.

Bronfenbrenner's conceptualisation of the development of violence in children has proven to be a particularly useful theoretical framework in the area of child development to many others as well. Salzinger, Feldman, Stockhammer and Hood (2002), for example, used an ecological framework to structure their review of the research on the risk of exposure to community violence and the effects of this exposure on children and adolescents. The risks for exposure and their effects were organised into five ecological domains, namely community and neighbourhood, family and household, relationships with parents and caregivers, relationships with peers, and personal characteristics.

In their review, Salzinger et al. (2002), point out how ideally suited the ecological-transactional perspective is for understanding the effects of exposing children to violence. They state that the use of this model is a logical and well-suited choice given all the evidence that exists on the importance of taking the context into consideration when understanding child development.

Gorman-Smith, et al.'s (2000) study, mentioned in Chapter One, is another example of the usefulness of ecological-development theory to frame the research. As stated previously, they used the ecological-development model of risk and development to better understand how family functioning influenced patterns of delinquency. A fundamental tenet to ecological-development theory is that the characteristics of a child's social setting, along with the interactions between these settings are central to his/her development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1988). The social characteristics of the community in which the family lives determine the influence that a major developmental factor, such as the family, has on a child (Gorman-Smith et al., 2000; Pantin et al., 2003).

In their study, Gorman-Smith et al. (2000) found that parenting practices were fully mediated in its relation to children becoming involved in violence by neighbourhood social processes. These findings reinforce the importance of studying the contexts in which a child finds himself/herself in order to understand or predict delinquent behaviour, further accentuating the usefulness of ecological theory in developmental studies. Considering how many developmental theorists subscribe to the ecological model, using Bronfenbrenner's theory was a logical choice in the present study.

Regarding the larger significance of the current study, the scope of this thesis does not allow for proposals for specific interventions. Suggestions of the ecological domains at which to pitch these interventions however can be made. There are many considerations when developing interventions. These include selecting the appropriate target group for the intervention, and determining the nature, timing, intensity and duration of the intervention (Dahlberg & Potter, 2001). The remainder of this chapter, however, will focus on the types of interventions for violent and/or at-risk children and the different levels at which they can be pitched.

Bronfenbrenner's model has also been used as a basis from which to formulate interventions for violent or at-risk youth (Borduin, 1999; Henggeler, Rodick, Borduin, Hanson, Watson, & Urey, 1986; Kadish, Glaser, Calhoun, & Risler, 1999; Salzinger et al., 2002). The evidence is clear: the most promising interventions are those that comprehensively address risk, by focussing on multiple systems in the child's environment (Dahlberg & Potter, 2001; Guerra, Eron, Huesmann, Tolan, & Van Acker, 1997; Tarolla, Wagner, Rabinowitz, & Tubman, 2002; The Multisite Violence Prevention Project, 2004). Instead of only focussing on the individual's cognitive, social, or behavioural factors, these interventions also include the context that shapes these individual characteristics.

Multisystem interventions are known to be the most effective (Borduin et al., 1995; Dahlberg & Potter, 2001; Reese, Vera, Simon, & Ikeda, 2000; Yoshikawa, 1995). The strong influence that a child's microenvironment has on his/her development is well-known (Duncan, & Miller, 2002; Fainsilber Katz & Low, 2004; Henry et al., 2001; Loeber & Dishion, 1983; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1987; Rutter, 1985). Family- and school-based interventions are therefore the most common type of multi-level intervention programmes. The following section provides two examples of two such intervention programmes that have been developed and implemented in recent years.

The Early Alliance prevention trial that was started in 1996 in South Carolina, USA, is a violence prevention initiative that was targeted at both the family and school contexts (Ikeda, Simon, & Swahn, 2001). The intervention was aimed at young children believed to be at risk for violence, namely from a socioeconomically disadvantaged background, with some displaying early signs of conduct problems.

Based on the social-interactional coping-competence model (Blechman, Prinz, & Dumas, 1995), the aim of the programme was to help the children develop the necessary skills, such as communication, to interact positively with others.

The home-based family intervention entailed promoting parenting skills and to help strengthen the support that children receive at home. The school-based intervention had three parts to it. The first was the Classroom Program, in which a positive learning experience was created through recognition of prosocial behaviour, encouragement of a love for learning and avoidance of aversive teaching practices (Dumas, Prinz, Smith, & Laughlin, 1999). The second school-based intervention, the Peer Intervention, attempted to help the children develop prosocial listening and communicating skills to use when interacting with their peers. Lastly, the Reading-Mentoring Intervention, focused on improving reading skills and academic ability through the use of high school-aged tutors (Ikeda et al., 2001).

The Metropolitan Area Child Study implemented in Illinois, USA, was both an intervention and evaluation study (Huesmann et al., 1996). The study's aim was both to prevent and understand the development of aggressive behaviour. They devised three levels of intervention, namely a classroom-, individual-, and family-based level, to be delivered in two-year segments. The classroom intervention aimed to make the classroom experience positive through teaching elementary school-age children how to be culturally sensitive toward others, and to reduce aggressive behaviour through a social-cognitive curriculum. The individual level used group sessions to try and change children's cognitions as well as improve peer relationship skills. Lastly, the family intervention was one-year long and aimed to teach parenting skills and to encourage family members to be more emotionally responsive.

The findings of the present study tie in well with these programme descriptions and research findings. It has served to reinforce the usefulness of ecological theory in understanding violence in children. It has shown how seemingly nonsensical acts of brutality by a group of children can be better understood if one takes their environmental contexts into consideration. It is neither constructive nor accurate to label individuals as violent anomalies in society without taking the time to understand what had led such individuals to their acts. In the exceptionally (and increasingly)

violent society that South Africa is, proactive steps need to be taken to address the growing violence pandemic. The most effective way to stave the tide is through prevention efforts or focusing on at-risk individuals. Whilst focusing interventions on adults could prove fruitful, efforts would be far more effective if aimed at developing youth. Interventions based on Bronfenbrenner's theory of taking children's developmental context into consideration, may well be the recommended route to follow.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: 'Diversion' the key for violent children

By David Yutar

How do you punish the very young for crimes of extreme violence?

That was the problem our courts were faced with after three young boys, aged between eight and 11, were accused of the murder of eight-year-old Isak Muggels on a Faure wine farm in December last year.

But the Directorate of Public Prosecutions withdrew murder charges against the boys this week on condition that they participate in a "diversion programme" run by the Sustainability Institute outside Stellenbosch.

Still in its infancy, the diversion programme was borne out of the so-called Saxenburg incident in February this year in which four Lynedoch primary school children killed 13 springboks and severely hurt another child.

The programme, one of 10 child development programmes run by the Sustainability Institute, was jointly developed by teacher and psychologist Grant Demas and Leila Falletisch, a social worker dealing with farm workers' children.

Falletisch feels strongly that what is apparent in the violence allegedly perpetrated by these children is a manifestation of an underlying social problem in farm worker communities.

These children, she says, grow up in an environment where violence is the order of the day, where it is perceived as the only method of resolving conflict and where passivity is regarded as a sign of weakness.

"I am surprised that we don't have more of this, knowing the children of the

community," said Falletisch.

What, then, are the key elements in the programme the Faure children will attend?

- ☐ First, they will undergo individual therapy with psychology students from Stellenbosch University, in an effort to teach them life skills.
- ☐ Each child will be matched with same-sex mentors (in this case, males) to get them to focus on positive relationships.

The absence of strong father figures in the lives of such children is a huge problem.

- ☐ They will take part in a garden project in which they will "learn to be part of a creative nurturing process as well as creating something beautiful for the community".
- ☐ The institute will establish ongoing contact with the families of the perpetrators to teach them effective parenting skills.

Falletisch points out that "in my experience, the parents (of such children) are fairly powerless".

- ☐ A strong restorative justice element will require the children, with their parents, to "do something for" or compensate the parents of the slain boy.

Falletisch said the present programme, although still in its infant and experimental stage, provided a far more effective and sustainable alternative than the traditional punishment of incarceration.

"We see this more as a community problem rather than one of children who are inherently bad," she said.

"There is nothing to show that the alternative - caning or sending the children to a place of safety - does much good in the long run.

"If we really want to prevent this happening again, we have to change their life experience and their way of managing aggression. I feel that wouldn't necessarily happen in a place of safety - certainly the literature supports this idea."

Falletisch said when the boys involved in the Saxenburg incident were sent to a place safety they were exposed to drugs and other evils for the first time in their lives.

Above all, she points out, what needs to be addressed is the wider problem of the breakdown of values within the community and not individual aberration among the young.

"If the child hasn't been given a grounding and a proper education, you cannot hold him responsible (for such crimes)."

The Faure boys will initially attend school at the institute from October 4 to December 2 but, says Falletisch, she hopes the programme will be extended to allow them to stay for up to a year.

The Sustainability Institute is an international living and learning centre located outside Stellenbosch.

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Appendix 2: Kids held after farm bloodbath

Boy beaten, buck slaughtered

March 08, 2004 *Edition 1*

Yunus Kemp

Six farm children, aged between eight and 13, face charges of attempted murder for allegedly tying up an eight-year-old and assaulting him when he threatened to expose their killing spree that left 21 buck dead - most of them a rare breed.

Two of the boys, who allegedly pushed a stick into their victim's anus, also face charges of indecent assault.

All six face charges of malicious damage to property after their alleged rampage on the Saxenburg wine farm in Kuils River left 15 rare black springbok and six Nguni miniature buck dead. Saxenburg has a children's farm as a tourist attraction.

The boys are alleged to have battered the animals to death with vine sticks and stones.

Saxenburg management has laid charges of trespassing, stock theft and animal abuse against them.

The six boys, from the Voorentoe farm in Kuils River, were arrested last week after police followed a bloody trail from Saxenburg to their homes and eventually their mothers' kitchens - where some of the buck carcasses were found.

After a brief appearance in the Blue Downs Magistrate's Court, two of the boys, aged 13 and nine, were released into the custody of their parents, while the others, two aged eight, one aged nine and one who is 11, were remanded to a place of safety.

Police spokesman Captain Eugene Sitzer said the assaulted boy had been discharged from hospital on Wednesday, two days after being found injured next to a tree by his grandmother 24 hours after the attack.

"He had been severely assaulted and his face was badly swollen. He also had several bruises to his body. It appears that he accompanied the boys to Saxenburg and then told them he was going to tell the farm's management what they had just done. They then assaulted him," Sitzler said.

His grandmother, Marie du Plessis, said the boy, who had spent the weekend at Voorentoe, had told her last Sunday that he was going home to his mother in Wesbank.

"On Monday morning, a friend came knocking on my door and told me my boy was in trouble. When I stepped outside, I saw him standing at a nearby tree in his underpants. His hands were tied.

"I went over and cut him free. His face was swollen and he was crying. He could hardly speak. I then took him to the farmer, who called an ambulance."

A farm worker, who had passed by on a quad bike, said he had seen the boy and described his condition as "terrible".

At Saxenburg, farm manager Len Coetzee contacted police after a security officer discovered 11 dead black Springbok on Monday morning.

"To my horror, I discovered the dead animals. There was a 12th one that was still living, but it later died. It appeared that the attackers beat them with stones and sticks. The carcasses were everywhere. It was gruesome and ghastly.

"The day before, on the Sunday morning, I was called down to the encampment of the miniature buck. Initially, I thought they'd been killed by a wild animal. But on closer inspection, I saw that there was no bite marks. With both sets of animals, it appeared that their heads were bashed in," said Coetzee.

Trackers from the police stock theft unit, summoned to Saxenburg, followed a blood trail leading from the wine farm to neighbouring Voorentoe. There, in the kitchens of farm workers, police discovered the carcasses of three more black springbok.

After being told that the six boys had brought the carcasses home, police rounded them up at school and took them to Saxenburg.

Coetzee said he was shocked at the boys' nonchalance.

"When police brought them here they confessed to killing the animals, but they looked like they did not have a care in the world. It appeared that they killed the animals for fun."

Coetzee said the black springbok, of which there are now 10 left at Saxenburg, were a rare breed and the farm had paid R1 000 each. The miniature buck, of which there are now seven left, cost R250 each.

Both breeds, which were acquired in South Africa, were popular with tourists visiting the farm, Coetzee said.

The boys were expected to appear in court on March 16.

☐ This incident comes less than two months after a similar farm attack allegedly by children led to a boy's death.

On a Faure wine farm in December, four boys, aged seven to 11, allegedly beat up eight-year-old Isaac Muggels and then tossed him, unconscious, into a farm dam, where he drowned.

The four boys have appeared before a magistrate.

<http://www.capeargus.co.za/index.php?fArticleId=368348>

Appendix 3: Six youngsters held after playmate's assault

Yunus Kemp

March 08 2004 at 11:21AM

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Coetzee said the black springbok, of which there are now 10 left at Saxenburg, were a rare breed and the farm had paid R1 000 each. The miniature buck, of which there are now seven left, cost R250 each.

Both breeds, which were acquired in South Africa, were popular with tourists visiting the farm, Coetzee said.

The boys were expected to appear in court on March 16.

This incident comes less than two months after a similar farm attack allegedly by children led to a boy's death.

On a Faure wine farm in December, four boys, aged seven to 11, allegedly beat up eight-year-old Isaac Muggels and then tossed him, unconscious, into a farm dam, where he drowned.

The four boys have appeared before a magistrate.

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